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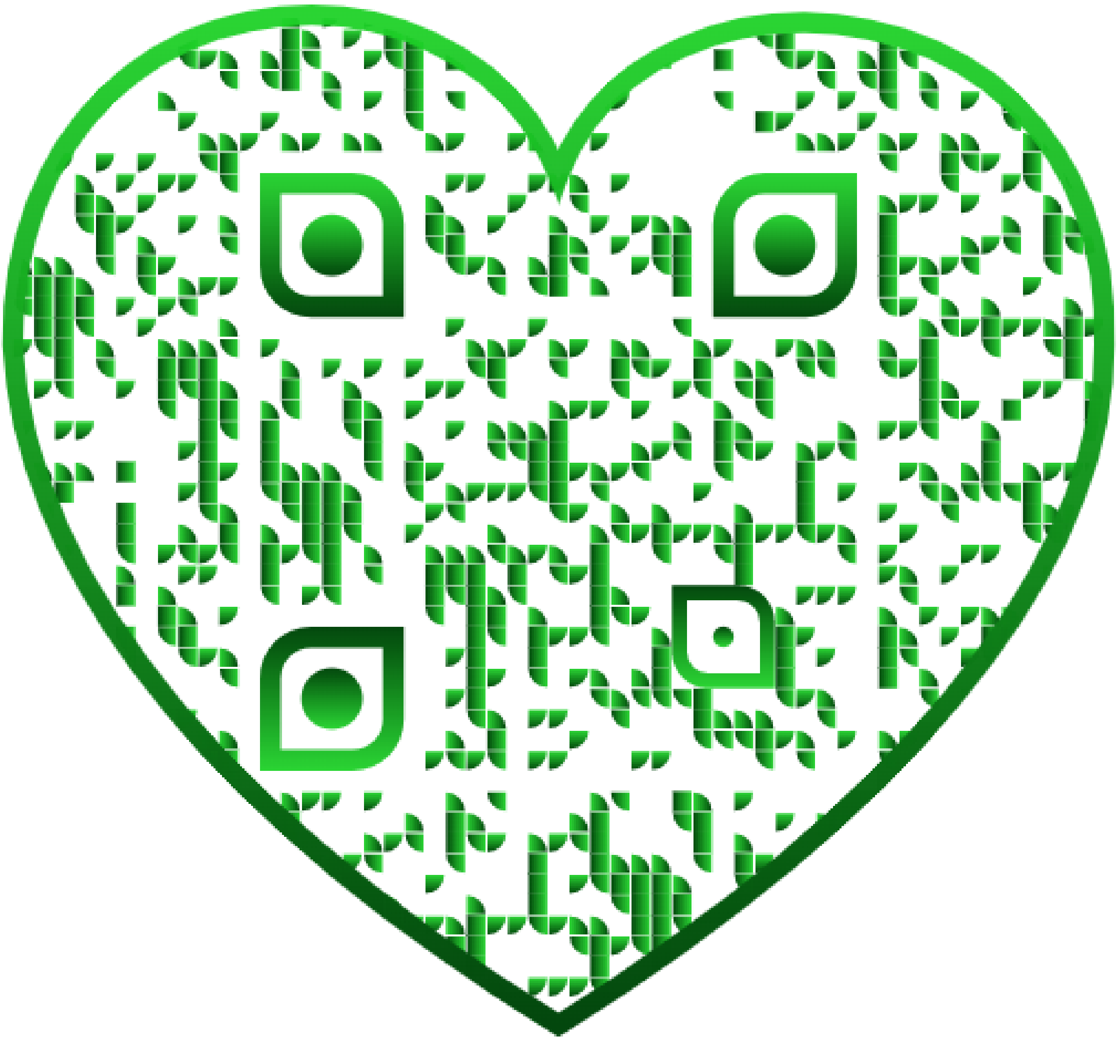

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Inspired by the regal aura of Queen Charlotte, **JW Marriott's** rooftop bar, **Aura**, invites you to soak in the city vibes with a botanical cocktail in hand. Across the street, get inspired by the masterpieces on display at the **Mint Museum Uptown**, **Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts + Culture** and **The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art**. Afterwards, enjoy a fine dining experience with elevated menus from **Albertine**, **Fin & Fino**, **Coquette** or **Mariposa**.

CONNECT WITH NATURE

Even in the heart of the city, you're never far from nature in this "City of Trees," ranked among the nation's best for tree canopy coverage. Explore **Romare Bearden Park** or **The Green**, two of Charlotte's urban greenspaces. Grab a coffee or wine at **Rosie's Coffee & Wine Garden**, then stroll through Charlotte's "secret garden," **McGill Rose Garden**, nestled in NoDa minutes from Uptown. For something that gets your heart racing, head to the **Whitewater Center** to take on ropes courses, hikes and exhilarating manmade whitewater rapids.

THRILL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Located between the Piedmont Mountain region and the Atlantic Ocean, Charlotte is a culinary dream with fresh, locally sourced ingredients. The seasons write the menu at **Restaurant Constance**, an intimate, 10-table concept from Chef Sam Diminich. **L'Ostrica** welcomes guests with a seasonal tasting menu that celebrates local ingredients and global influences. For more international fare, grab a table at **Yunta Nikkei** in South End where the flavors of Peruvian Nikkei cuisine are served.

GO GREEN(WAY)

With over 70 miles of greenway, it's easy to escape into nature in Charlotte. Meander along the public art-filled **Charlotte Rail Trail** in the city's booming Uptown and South End neighborhoods. Along the way, break for pit stops at **Sycamore Brewing** and **Trolley Barn**. For the iconic Insta-worthy skyline shot, breeze through **Irwin Creek** and **Stewart Creek Greenway** where you can enjoy a lunch at **Community Matters Café**, transforming lives through a life skills and rehabilitation program.

> **Bask in blue sky enchantment as you delight in lush landscapes alongside urban sophistication that boosts your mind, body and spirit. Filled with comforting Southern flavors, towering skyline views and even the roar of whitewater rapids, explore ways to unwind and refresh.**

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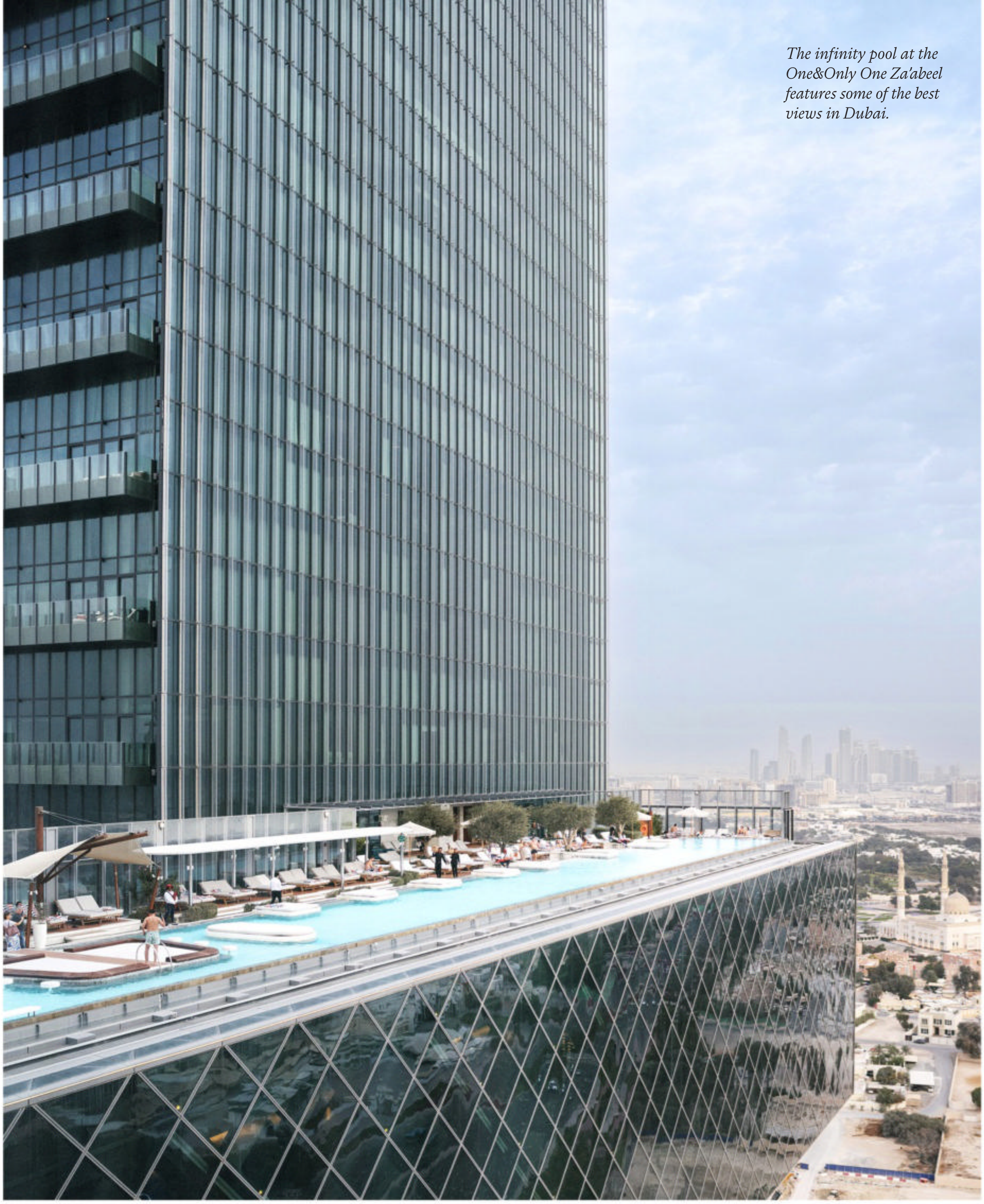

The infinity pool at the One&Only One Za'abeel features some of the best views in Dubai.

FEDERICO CIAMEI

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Exceptional for design, service, and commitment to their communities, these 25 new and renovated properties are best in class.

Cape Grace
Cape Town, South Africa

Corinthia Grand Hotel Astoria
Brussels, Belgium

Dar Tantora The House Hotel
AlUla, Saudi Arabia

Dusit Thani
Bangkok, Thailand

Four Seasons Hotel Osaka
Osaka, Japan

Hôtel du Couvent
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Janu Tokyo
Tokyo, Japan

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One&Only One Za'abeel
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Palazzo Talìa
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Jaipur, India

Regent Santa Monica Beach
Santa Monica, California

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Soneva Secret
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Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana

The Dunlin
Johns Island, South Carolina

The Lana
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TRY NOT TO FILL UP ON VIEWS.

They say that the first bite is with the eyes. And nowhere is that more true than at the Araxi Longtable dining experience in Pemberton where guests indulge in natural wonder both on their plates and all around them. Hungry? Find this and other Canadian culinary experiences at **RootedInCanada.com**

CANADA

Pemberton, British Columbia

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BOOKS

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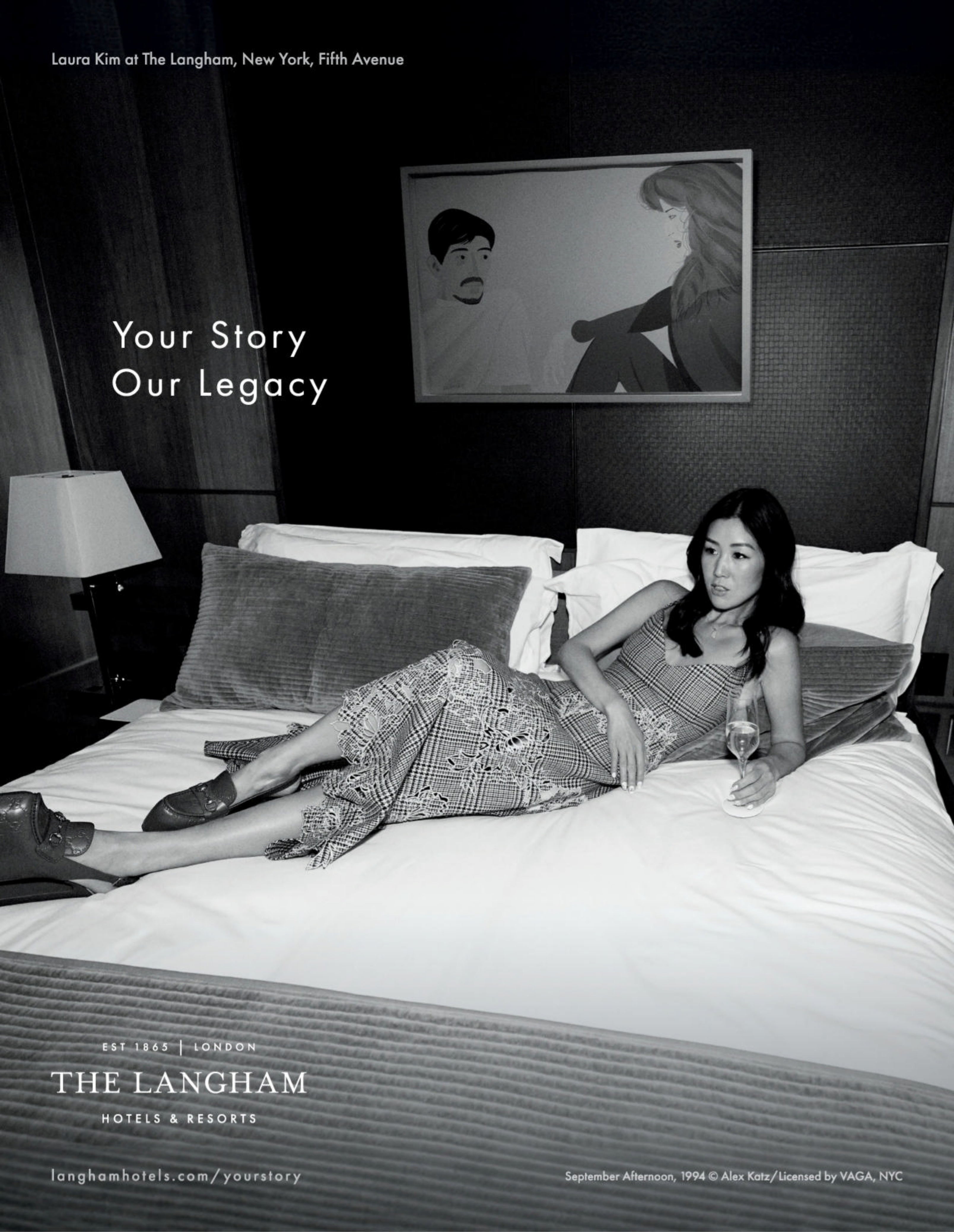
ILLUSTRATIONS: DEREK ABELLA (UNPACKED); MARK PERNICE (CONNECT); ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE (JUST BACK FROM)
PHOTOS: SHAWN MICHAEL JONES (MIX); SCOTT SUCHMAN (GREAT AMERICAN CITIES: WASHINGTON, D.C.); BETHANY MOLLENKOF (DOWN IN THE VALLEY)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September Afternoon, 1994 © Alex Katz/Licensed by VAGA, NYC

Features

There's truth to a vision that blurs past and present, to the notion of palimpsest, of the old peeking out from the new.

IN FRAME

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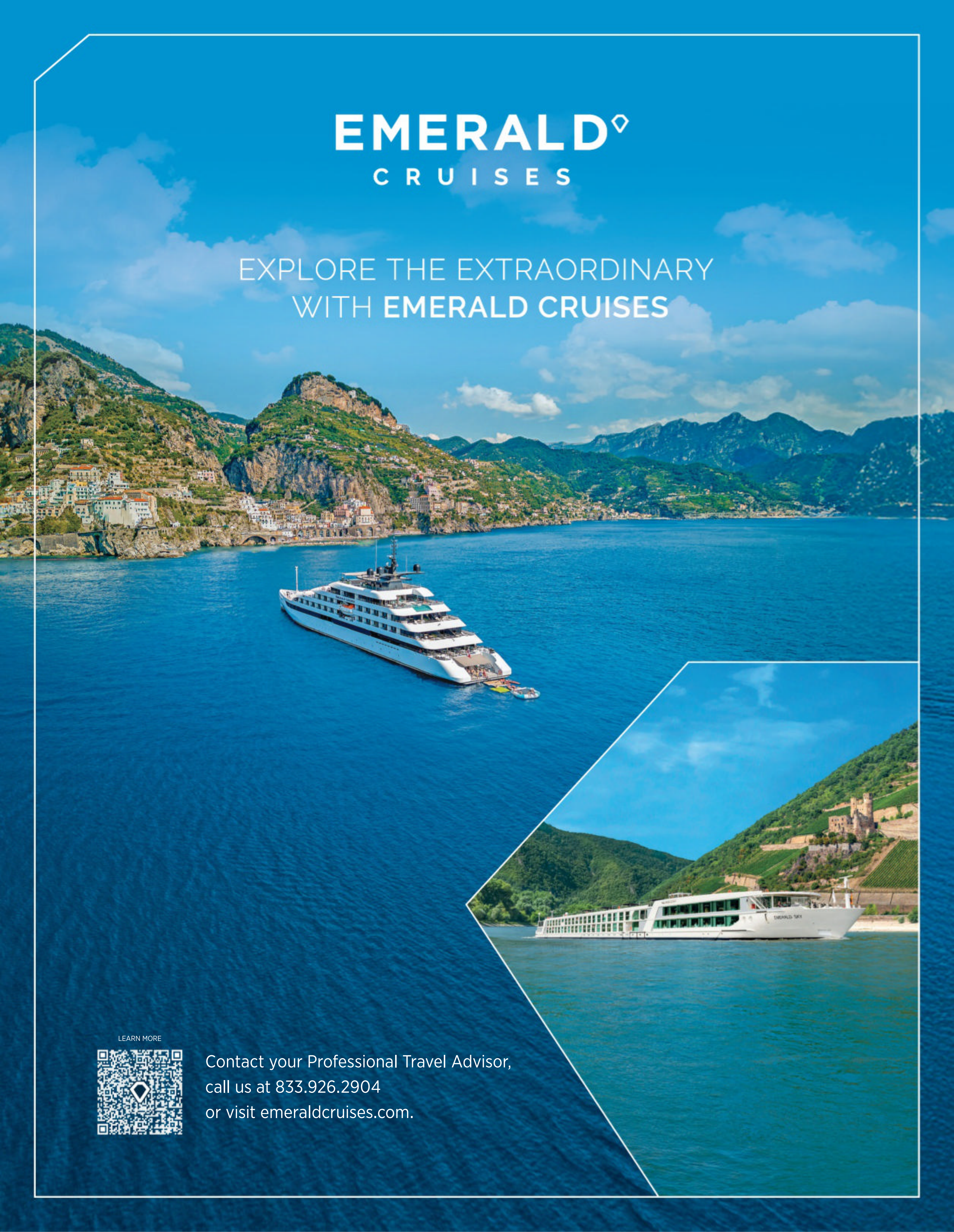
AN RONG XU



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CONTEMPORARY ART, LIVE JAZZ and farm-fresh cuisine, our three-day itinerary is designed for the traveler who seeks a deeper sense of place.

Day 1: ART & ELEGANCE

STAY: Select the perfect stay: **Andrew Pinckney Inn**, a charming, boutique escape in the heart of the historic district. **The Vendue**, Charleston's art hotel, filled with creative energy and rotating exhibits. **Wentworth Mansion**, a grand historic estate offering refined luxury and timeless Southern charm.

MORNING: Ease into the day with an early visit to the **Gibbes Museum of Art**, where a rich collection of works celebrates the area's artistic heritage.

LUNCH: Savor a meal at **82 Queen**, where a lush courtyard and a steaming bowl of She-crab soup set the tone for a quintessential Charleston afternoon.

AFTERNOON: Explore the intimate, contemporary space of **Helena Fox Fine Art**, showcasing works that capture the Lowcountry's soul.

EVENING: Dine at **Revival**, where innovative takes on historic Southern recipes highlighting the region's culinary evolution. Immerse yourself in the performing arts scene at **PURE Theatre**, known for its bold, thought-provoking productions in an intimate setting.

Day 2: JAZZ & ROOFTOP VIEWS

MORNING: Begin your day with a leisurely stroll soaking in the morning light and quiet charm. Then, enjoy lunch at **Beautiful South**, where American-style Chinese dishes bring bold flavors and a fresh twist to classic comfort food.

AFTERNOON: Wander through Charleston's hidden alleyways, then visit a pop-up jazz performance or midday set as part of **Charleston Jazz Festival** (when in season).

EVENING: Savor refined Lowcountry cuisine at **Slightly North of Broad** before diving into an electrifying **Charleston Jazz** performance.

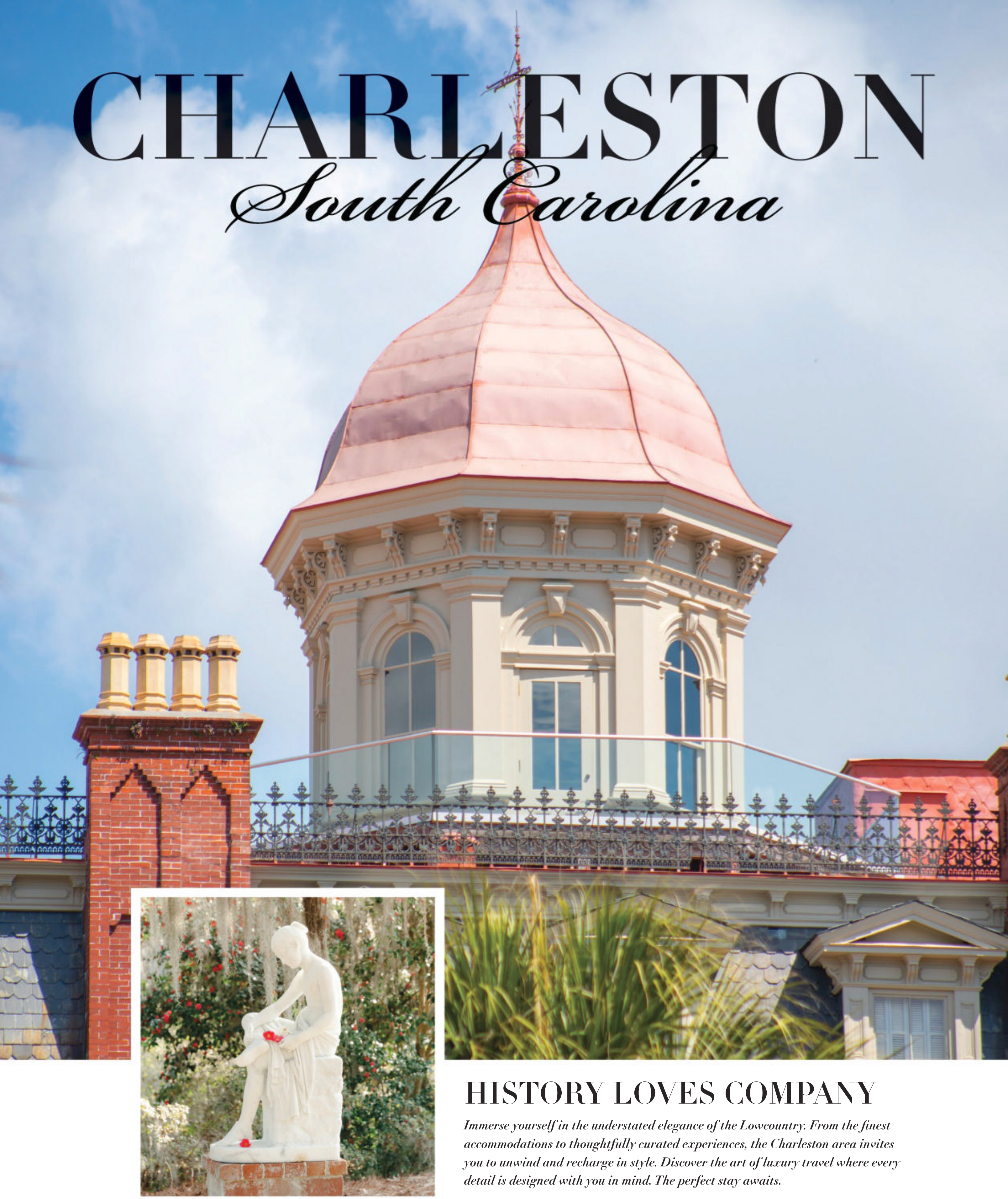
Day 3: A RIVERSIDE RETREAT

STAY: Escape the city for a night at **The Inn at Middleton Place**, a modernist sanctuary on the banks of the Ashley River, surrounded by gardens and history.

MORNING: Wake up to nature with a riverside breakfast at the inn, then explore the historic **Middleton Place** grounds and paddle through the serene tidal creeks.

AFTERNOON: Unwind before heading back into town or take a guided horseback ride along the plantation trails.

SCAN FOR YOUR **COMPLIMENTARY** VACATION GUIDE.



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What was the best cultural event you traveled for recently?

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"I went to New York City to see the actors Jordan Fisher and Maia Reficco in *Hadestown* on Broadway. I've always been a fan of musical theater and Greek mythology, and the show offered a fresh take on them both." **—E.S.**

"I visited teamLab Borderless in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It's a wild museum of immersive digital art—mind-bending, mystifying, hypnotic, and completely captivating." **—N.C.**

"In Florence I saw a special Michelangelo exhibit about the artist's relationship with power and politics at the incredible Palazzo Vecchio." **—C.S.**

"I traveled to Paris for the 2024 Summer Olympics and was surprised by how much I loved it. I'm already greedily eyeing Milano Cortina tickets for 2026!" **—T.A.**

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SCOTT SUCHMAN

Located in Washington, D.C., the Renwick Gallery displays works of American craft and decorative art.

AMY ALIPIO

WRITER

Great American Cities: Washington, D.C., page 86
IG @amyalipio

Amy Alipio's first job in journalism was working as an editor at the English-language newspaper *Budapest Week* while living in Hungary. There, she "learned how to look at one destination from all sorts of angles to find a diversity of stories." For her piece on the U.S. capital, Alipio used her knowledge as a D.C. native "to share the everyday cultural awesomeness that gets overshadowed by monumental, federal Washington." Her best bit of travel advice? "Stay rigidly flexible."

BETHANY MOLLENKOF

PHOTOGRAPHER

Down in the Valley, page 94
IG @fancybethany

Bethany Mollenkof first fell in love with Valle de Guadalupe in Mexico during a visit in 2017. She was excited to return—for the third time—to photograph this feature, using the region's crisp winter light "as a character to tell this story." Mollenkof found kindred souls in the winemakers she photographed. "As someone who often feels climate dread," she says, "it was comforting to talk to people so deeply invested in the sustainability and ecology of their community."

MARK PERNICE

ILLUSTRATOR

Boarding School, page 27
IG @marknessofdarkness

After years spent surfing New York City's waves, Mark Pernice was up for the task of illustrating "Boarding School," a story by blind surfer and contributing writer Ryan Knighton. Pernice says that most of his work begins with "thinking about surfing." For this project, "it just so happens to be justified." Personally aware of the challenges that come with riding waves, Pernice found this piece particularly moving. "Knowing there are people with the moxie it requires to surf blind is inspiring."

SHAWN MICHAEL JONES

PHOTOGRAPHER

That's the Ticket, page 34
IG @shawnmichaeljones

Brooklyn-based photographer Shawn Michael Jones uses color to guide the direction of his still-life imagery. "Once I settle on a color," he says, "everything else falls into place." For this issue, he shot a collection of transit tickets from around the world, relying on a dose of nostalgia. Growing up, Jones's father was stationed with the U.S. Air Force in Stuttgart, Germany, and he used to ride the local Stadtbahn trains. He saved every ticket. "They were like collector's items to me," Jones says.

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First opened by chef Gabriela Cámara in 1998, the seafood cantina Contramar remains my favorite Mexico City stop for a long lunch of ceviche, octopus cocktail, and mezcal.

MARCUS NILSSON

Cultural Currency

IN JANUARY I TRAVELED to Mexico City—a place I've visited often and love deeply—for a business trip. And while I did have meetings focused on long-term goals and strategic objectives, I also used the four days as an excuse to explore. (Though the term "bleisure" boils my grammarian blood, it is apt.) With several Afar colleagues, I ate tuna tostadas at Contramar and sipped natural wine at Ticuchi; gazed at David Alfaro Siqueiros murals at Chapultepec Castle; and soaked up the dynamic and intangible spirit of the sprawling city.

Afar readers yearn to experience culture wherever they are in the world. A country's art, architecture, museums, music, design, food, and wine are rooted in history and heritage—and speak to its national identity. In this issue devoted to culture, we focus on the passion points that help travelers connect to the world more deeply.

Contributing writer Anya von Bremzen journeys to northern Mexico's Valle de Guadalupe, where female winemakers are breaking rules all while helping the destination move forward more sustainably (page 94); Washington, D.C., resident Amy Alipio talks to three local luminaries about the district's rich cultural past, present, and future (page 86); and contributing writer Bonnie Tsui visits Guangzhou, China, to gain a more nuanced understanding of her artist father (page 76). We also reveal our annual list of the world's best new hotels (page 37), a wonderfully eclectic collection of properties that has already inspired my next trip. (See you soon, Santa Monica!)

As the world becomes increasingly homogenized, authentic cultural experiences matter even more when we travel, because they feed our curiosity and open our minds to new ways of thinking and seeing. "A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people," Mahatma Gandhi once said. I couldn't agree more.

Travel well,
JULIA COSGROVE
Editor in Chief

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by **LATRIA GRAHAM**
Illustrations by **DEREK ABELLA**

Cost of Living

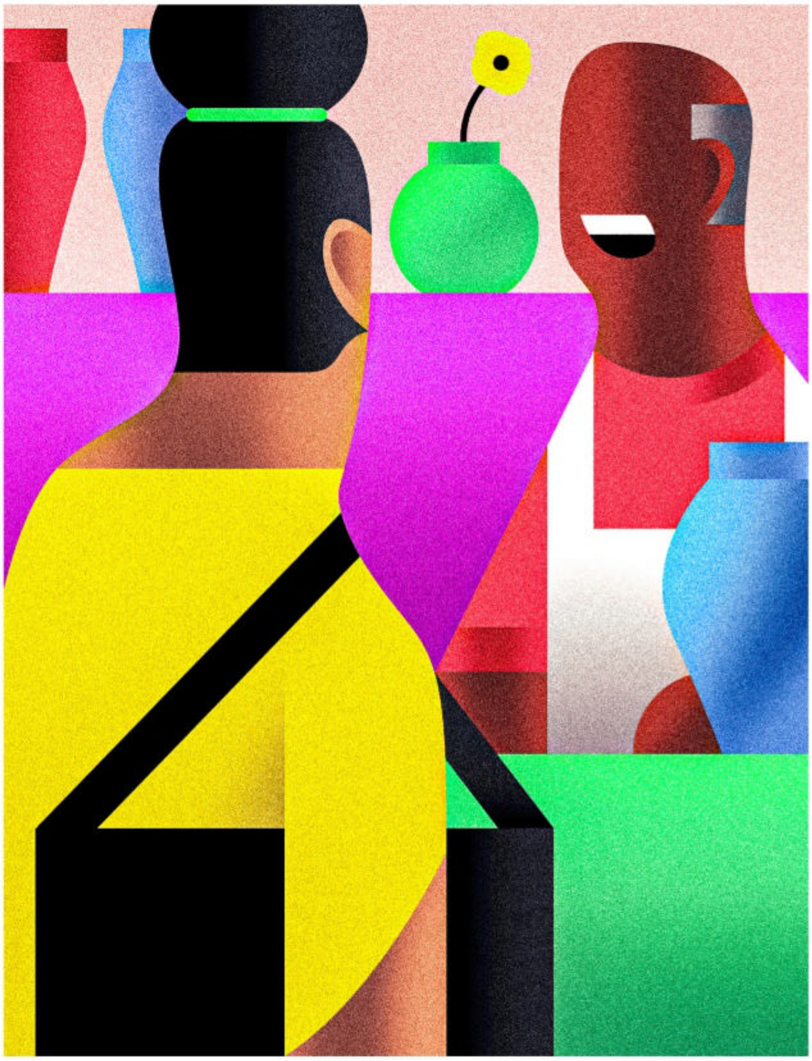
During a visit to her ancestral hometown, our columnist considers the aesthetic homogenization that threatens to consume it—and what that means for the world.

WHEN I SAW THE FRANCHISE restaurant billboards on the interstate, I understood that my father's hometown in Newberry County, South Carolina, had irrevocably changed. Walking along the main street, I felt like a tourist in a place I once knew.

I sat for lunch at a café with a quirky neon sign, but soon realized I'd fallen into a social media trap. With its mismatched plates and repurposed wood tables, it appeared as if the owners had taken every Instagram trend and created a place that would photograph well. Transplants, they told me they'd moved to the area because it was "cheap," and they saw an opportunity. I ate a roasted beet salad that cost $20.

On my way out of town I stopped at another restaurant and paid $50 for two takeout meals for family dinner. As I pulled out my debit card, I thought, *Who is this for?* My relatives would struggle to come to these spots on special occasions, let alone as regular patrons. In this pocket of the state northwest of Columbia, the average salary is $20.54 per hour. Most folks who can make more than that do: They move to areas with higher wage rates, contributing to what sociologists call "rural brain drain."

It wasn't just the restaurants that felt designed for outsiders seeking small-town charm: It was the boutique shops that didn't carry my size, the souvenir stops that sold made-in-China merchandise. All of it gave me pause. Because while tourism and suburbanization are changing this area, they also might be saving it.



After all, the empty lots are blank canvases for those with access to capital; they can build something travelers are willing to visit. This leaves the town I adore suffering from two forces: rural vulnerability (due to factors such as poor infrastructure, declining population, and geographic isolation) and something that writer Kyle Chayka calls algorithmic flattening, wherein people consume similar types of digital content on social media platforms "no matter where they live, so their preferences are shaped in that image."

The story of this small town I love is similar to that of rural spaces all over the world. Instead of creating properties that pay homage to an area's history, developers prioritize popularity, and a "luxury" overlay evident in larger municipalities erodes the town's historic identity. But being a conscientious small-business owner means figuring out how to integrate into a place while also acknowledging its past. If changes are executed sustainably, local populations can benefit from hosting visitors who want to try new things and learn more about these communities.

It's up to us travelers to seek out and support the kind of places that make a destination special. In the early stages of trip planning, I view the town's visitors bureau website or peruse a local travel publication, as listings in these guides are typically free for businesses. I search online for Black-owned, minority-owned, Native-owned, disability-owned, queer-owned, and woman-owned establishments. (Sites like Intentionalist, which has a map that highlights many of these categories in the United States and Canada, make the search easier.) In the U.S., 68 cents of every dollar spent at small businesses stays in the region, per American Express.

When I think about the potential impact of a visit, I ask myself, *How will my presence change this place?*

When I think about the potential impact of a visit, I ask myself, *How will my presence change this place?* After my experience in my dad's hometown, I've added another question: *Who is this experience for?* When I find myself waffling on an item within my budget, I ask, *Who makes the product? How is it made—and how long does it take to make? Does it support a social cause?*

To experience parts of a region I can't find through research, I turn to word of mouth. The service people at my lodgings usually have spots they frequent to get away from the crowds and eat lunch. At the end of a local-led walking tour, I inquire about my guide's favorite place to catch a sunset in town. I also often ask independent business owners for their recommendations on where to shop, because most want to support proprietors who are their friends and neighbors. Given my typical travel preferences, like visiting during shoulder season, there's usually enough space for the locals and me to coexist respectfully.

Moving around the world this way creates stories, not just an aesthetic to post on social media. But it's a balance. Because when I'm making decisions—from choosing my next meal to buying souvenirs—I often spend so much time contemplating the virtue of my choices that I'm no longer in the moment. Sometimes I forget my favorite part of traveling is being present, slaking my curiosities, and embodying the spirit of exploration. The connections I forge on the ground mean I have folks I can check in with when I return to a destination. This is my way of sustaining our global society—doing my best to ensure that small businesses and communities will be there for future generations to experience.

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Taste

For a quick bite, try **Chaia**'s seasonal vegetarian specialties, like braised mushroom tacos with feta, salsa roja, and cilantro. Dig into locally sourced all-American classics at **Founding Farmers**. Head to **FishScale**, a Black-woman-owned sustainable seafood shop for a Maryland crab burger. Enjoy a fine dining experience at chef Rob Rubba's Michelin Green–starred **Oyster Oyster**. Rubba focuses on local, seasonal cuisine, including stuffed squash blossoms with green corn, mushrooms, and chili. And make sure to save room for desserts like the Appalachian allspice cake.

Learn

See the new exhibition, *Lights Out: Recovering Our Night Sky*, at the **Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History** (through December 2025). Explore the **U.S. National Arboretum** and its **National Bonsai & Penjing Museum** or view different ecosystems up close at the **U.S. Botanic Garden.**

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CONNECT

Boarding School

A blind traveler heads to Hawai'i to catch some waves—and finds a memorable surfing partner in the process.

by Ryan Knighton

Illustrations by Mark Pernice

HANALEI BAY is on the northern shore of Kaua‘i, the fourth largest of the Hawaiian islands. Picture palm trees and lush river valleys, wild chickens whose feathers are flecked with turquoise. A cobalt ocean pleated by waves, pretty as the mind’s eye can imagine. When I visited, I didn’t see a lick of it. In fact, I saw nothing at all.

Since I’m a blind traveler, my impression of a place doesn’t form from sights. Most often it is given to me by somebody else, someone who knows the sounds, tastes, smells, and sensations specific to wherever I am. You might call her a guide. You might call him a fixer. In the case of Hanalei Bay, that someone was a surfer named Johnny Quinn.

When I asked my hotel’s concierge if she could help me find a surfing partner to be my eyes, worry was her vibe. *Fair enough*, I thought. Although I’ve been surfing off and on for more than a decade, my week in Hanalei would be my first real go at tackling a wave away from home. On Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where I live, I’m deeply familiar with my mellow beach break. Nevertheless, I’ve broken ribs and ground my face along the ocean floor. I’ve torn both shoulders. I’ve been caught in rip currents and held under waves long enough to get properly spooked. I’d never surfed anywhere else, and Johnny, a California transplant and former bartender at the hotel, had never caught waves with a blind person before. Luckily for me, he was curious and game when the concierge came looking for a volunteer.

THE NEXT MORNING, I waited at Titus Kinimaka’s Hawaiian School of Surfing. It was 8:30 and the sun had barely risen, but already I felt it broiling my pasty Canadian skin. Johnny was a few minutes late, and I was nervous, pacing the porch of the surf school. I wasn’t sure how I would pull this off in a difficult bay I’d never explored, even though I’d have his help. A surfer must visually anticipate the exact spot where a wave will break. Changing tide, current, and wind conditions all complicate the matter. I would have to keep my board and body angled just right to the incoming swell, or the wave would jack me up, tip me over, and spin me around like a washing machine. It’s scary not to see what’s happening. Worse, you can only be talked through it if your head is still above water.

A truck rumbled into the parking lot. “Sorry I’m late,” Johnny said, approaching. “I walked into a cobweb and had to chase a spider with a brush. Want to feel?”

He gave me a hug hello and put my hand on his head to reveal a long, wild explosion of curls where the spider had tried to homestead. The big hair matched his baritone and broad shoulders, the kind that come from years of scratching over 10- and 20-foot swells. At least now I had an image in my mind of the man I could easily lose in the water.

Hanalei Bay is roughly two miles wide and smiles like a crescent moon. It’s peppered with legendary surf breaks, each different in character and difficulty. Some waves rise over reef walls on the sea bottom. Others, like Pine Trees, groom wedgy sandbars.

We decided to start by the pier at the mouth of the Hanalei River. The waves were small and gentle, because the swell wasn’t as powerful at that moment. We figured I could walk out with my board until I was about chest deep and let Johnny push me into a few, so he could get a feel for working with my blindness.

Right away, the shallows gave Johnny pause. They were dotted with tourists, and I would have to somehow thread my luck between them. A surfboard fin carving through the water is basically a saw blade and would meet people as such. I wore my bright yellow rashguard that declared CAUTION: BLIND SURFER (FOR REAL). Then again, if swimmers could read the words on my chest, it was probably too late. And even if I cleared a path, how would I know when to stop? Too far and I would hit the rocky shore—hard.

The only way to figure it out was to try. I blew the first two waves, unable to catch them. Again and again, Johnny told me when to paddle and when to pop up, only to watch me bury the nose of the board under water or see me topple backward over the tail. Finally, on our fourth attempt, I hopped to my feet as Johnny shouted, “Left, left, left,” his voice receding.

That wave was my first glimpse, or feeling, of the bay’s magic. The unbroken wall of water felt buttery under my board, and fast. It ran silent for 10, 15, 20 seconds—a surfer’s brief eternity—as I raced into the void and braced for impact with someone or something. Then I heard the boil of

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whitewash around my feet, the wave having collapsed on itself, finished. I casually stepped off my board, and another surfer hooted, "Blind guy smoked the left!"

Within seconds, Johnny was next to me on his board, stoked and giddy, hooting and laughing. He told me I had somehow angled through a group of swimmers as if I could see. We had proof of concept, at least in part, that we could do this together with a little luck. Now all we had to do was devise a system to get me out deeper, and into something bigger.

A **AS WATER PUSHES INTO A BAY,** it must find its way back out. The force can carve a trench into the sand below you and create a rip current, a fast-moving channel of water that will haul your unsuspecting ass out to sea. Surfers rely on rip currents to carry them into deeper water, but they terrify me. They're silent, so I can't hear if I'm caught in one, nor can I see or feel if I'm being dragged away. Johnny could try to call me through the rip, but if I were sucked past him, or lost his voice, I'd be in trouble.

"I wish I could hang onto your elbow," I shouted over the din of crashing surf. "At least I could follow you through this."

I was paddling madly into the bay and already lost in a rip. Johnny's shouts to "go left, more left, now right, straight, no, straighter" were too overwhelming and imprecise against the speed of the ocean. But suddenly, Johnny was in front of me and, inching back on his board, reached his toes to the nose of mine, hooked them on, and guided me in a two-man train out to sea. Not a word was needed until we reached the break a hundred yards out. It was both genius and Herculean on his part. Safaris don't have better guides.

The next question was how to get me into a wave. Since Johnny couldn't stand in the water anymore and correct my board's angle with a push of his hands, I suggested we use a clockface to describe direction. Straight to the beach would be 12 o'clock. A left-peeling wave would mean I needed to aim my board like a hand at 11 o'clock. A right-peeling wave, 1 o'clock. This way Johnny could shout what "time" I was at, and where I needed to be.

> **I could see a wave for myself, not by looking or listening, but by feeling it in my feet, a description of the water as I carved back and forth.**

The swell wasn't too big, but it was picking up. Bobbing up and down in the water, with no fixed point in the bay to look at, I felt motion sickness bloom behind my eyes. A surfer swooped past doing a trick, standing on his head, or so I was told.

"OK, start paddling, you're at 10, crank to 1 o'clock," Johnny said. "This one is yours."

I could hear a wall of water rushing at me. "But then what do I need to do?" I hollered, trying not to sound panicked. I'd be on my own if I caught it; words wouldn't carry. With only a few seconds to spare, Johnny looked ahead and divined the unfolding shape of my wave.

It would likely stand up fast and be steep, so I would have to pop up as soon as I felt it.

"Lean a little on your toes when you drop to the bottom," he said, "and surf to the right. But listen for the sound of the wave crumbling ahead of you," he added.

That, he imagined, would be my audio cue to change direction. As soon as I felt the wave rebuilding under my tail, I'd swing my weight the other way so that the pocket of peeling energy, where a wave curls in on itself, could catch up and slingshot me as far as possible back to the left. I would zig, then I would zag.

Now I had a picture of my wave in mind. A story, not an elbow, to follow.

"Ready to shreddy?" was Johnny's last question, with no time to answer.

In my mind's eye, tourists and chickens alike relaxed on the beach, watching waves stripe the ocean like corduroy. On one they would have spotted a blind guy enacting every move Johnny had anticipated. Finally, in a way, I could see a wave for myself, not by looking or listening, but by feeling it in my feet, a description of the water as I carved back and forth, up and down, my board like a finger on the braille of the bay. Ⓐ

Contributing writer Ryan Knighton explored Jordan for Afar's November/December 2019 issue. Illustrator Mark Pernice is profiled on page 16.

YUKI TANAKA
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by **TIM CHESTER** | Illustration by **MARÍA HERGUETA**

How to Really, Truly Unplug on Your Travels

Is it even possible to travel unplugged in 2025? Since Afar ran a campaign to encourage travelers to explore device-free in 2018, smartphones have gotten smarter and more omnipresent in our lives. Americans spend an average of 4.5 hours per day on them, up from just under three hours in 2022. It's harder than ever to power down, but it's worth trying. Multiple studies have shown that less screen time can improve your mental health, which, in turn, can provide more space for big-picture ideas and help you travel more deeply.

Disconnecting "resets your nervous system and allows you to be more present with your thoughts," says Chip Conley, founder of the Joie de Vivre hotel chain and the Modern Elder Academy, which offers midlife retreats aimed at helping people find purpose and inspiration. "It also allows you to be more present to cultivating awe—to see the world differently."

In *The Psychology of Travel* (Routledge, 2023), Andrew Stevenson shares how travel can make us happier, especially if we foster a state of mindfulness. That can be achieved by experiencing places through the senses directly, by dancing, cooking, or visiting a gallery—"things," he says, "associated with the offline experience, multisensory rather than digital."

Prepare for a more analog trip

Conley says you need to do three things to disconnect with impunity: set an out-of-office message "that gives you comfort that others can support you while you're offline and doesn't make you feel guilty for not being expeditious in your response"; tell people the boundaries you'd like to set for the trip; and consider "alternative ways of doing something that don't require technology."

There are practical ways to prepare. First, delete apps you love or fear; buy a paper journal; set bills on autopay; and ask a neighbor to keep an eye on your home. But perhaps the most important preparation must happen in your mind.

Stevenson says travelers tend to fall into one of two categories, present-focused and future-focused. The former "find it quite easy to just fully immerse themselves and enter a flow state in a new situation," not worrying about Monday's to-do list. The latter "find it hard to switch off"; they're the ones checking emails on the beach, he says. He recommends being future-focused before you set off and present-focused when on the trip, perhaps keeping a diary while you're away or setting aside five minutes to think about your everyday commitments at home and then putting them out of your mind.

Be realistic about your time

On your trip, when, where, and how long you unplug is up to you. "A few hours or even minutes unplugged can bring fresh perspective and renewed energy," says Anna Bjurstam, who heads up global wellness initiatives for Six Senses resorts. If you want a serious session, head to a silent retreat or a region with no Wi-Fi.

You can also look for a hotel that facilitates disconnection. Miraval Resorts & Spas encourage digital mindfulness and provide guests with "cell phone sleeping bags," paper pads and pens for note-taking, and a map of where phone usage is permitted. At many Six Senses locations, guests can hand their phones in at reception, "giving themselves permission to fully disconnect for a few hours," Bjurstam says.

I find it easiest to disconnect in small doses, going into "sleep mode" so that I'm offline but still reachable in an emergency. On some past trips, I've also temporarily traded my iPhone for a Light Phone, a "dumb phone" that offers basic texting and calls.

Get personal

How to resist the urge to look up something on your phone while traveling? Afar contribuing writer Lisa Abend has a few ideas. In 2024, she launched The Unplugged Traveler newsletter. Each month she visits a new place without using the web to plan her itinerary, aiming to bring back a bit of the magic of travel.

Abend recommends seeking out a tourist office for free maps, asking to see hotel rooms before booking, and, most importantly, talking to locals—about directions, good restaurants, or if they can recommend must-sees. "You'd be surprised how often those kinds of interactions lead to more substantive conversations," she says. "That's where the real serendipity happens." Ⓐ

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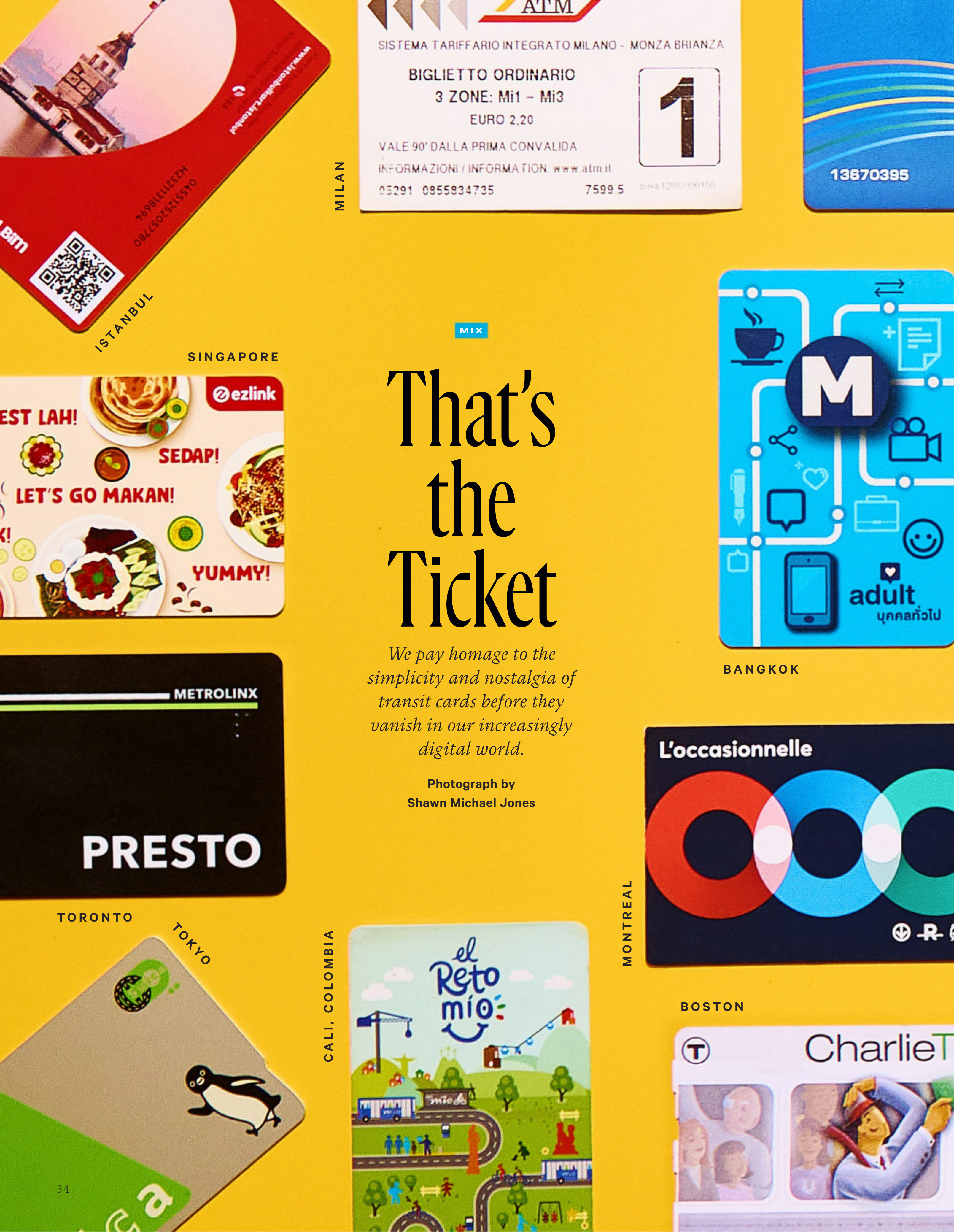
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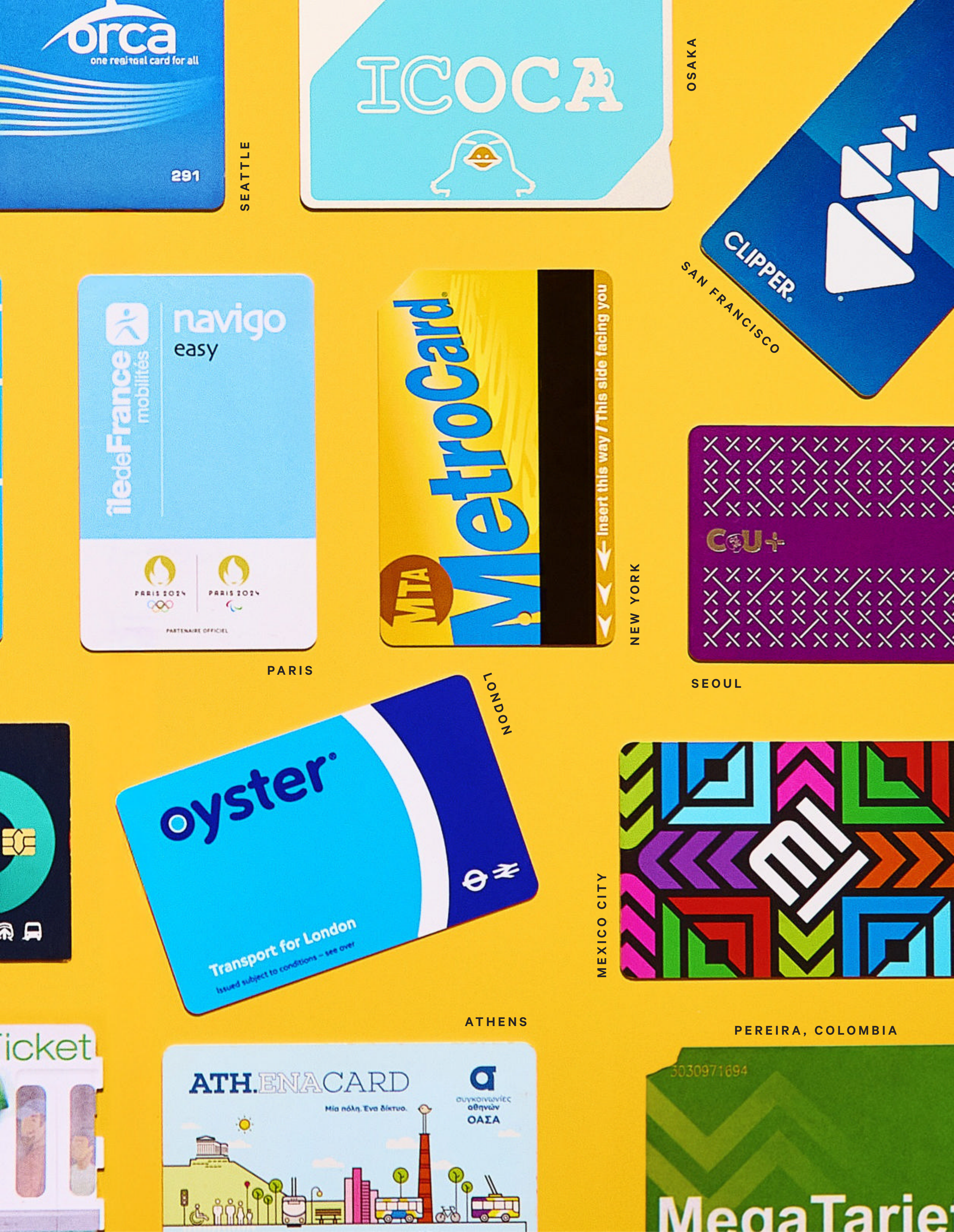
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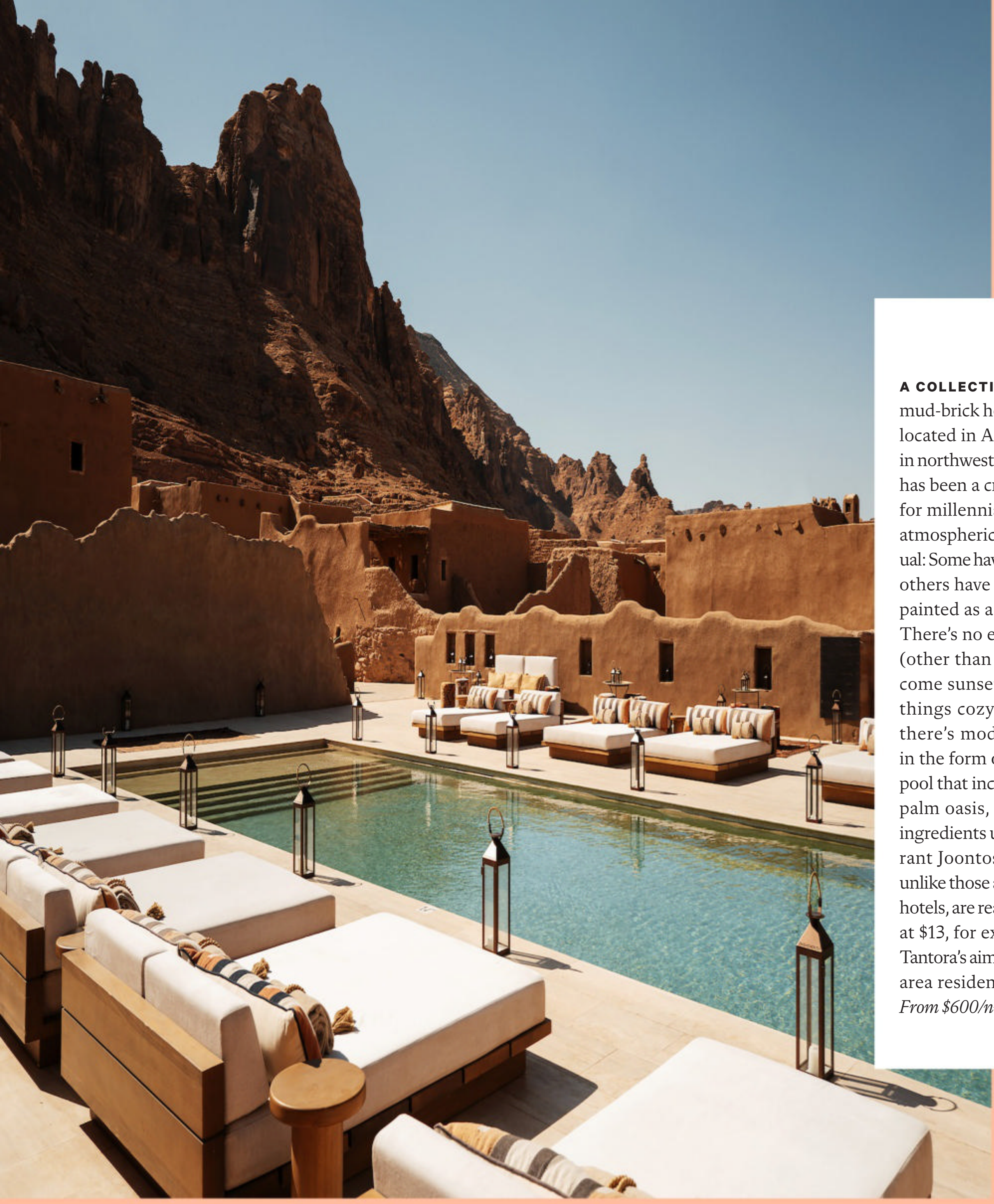
Georgetown, Prince Edward Island

The Best New Hotels 2025

EACH YEAR, after much consideration and debate, Afar's global network of editors, writers, and travel advisors anoints the best new and renovated hotels in the world. For 2025, we've selected 25 properties that offer so much more than just a picture-perfect stay. These are places that help redefine a destination, set a new bar for sustainability and design, and bring travelers into communities where their dollars can really count. Inspiration for your next great trip starts here.

EDITED BY JENNIFER FLOWERS

LETTERING BY ABRAHAM LULE



Dar Tantora The House Hotel

ALULA, SAUDI ARABIA

A COLLECTION OF centuries-old mud-brick houses, Dar Tantora is located in AlUla, an ancient city in northwestern Saudi Arabia that has been a crossroads of cultures for millennia. The 30 rooms are atmospheric and wholly individual: Some have sunny roof terraces, others have murals traditionally painted as a gift for newlyweds. There's no electric lighting here (other than in bathrooms), and come sunset, candlelight keeps things cozy and romantic. But there's modernity to be found in the form of a sleek swimming pool that includes views of a date palm oasis, the source of many ingredients utilized at the restaurant Joontos. Food prices here, unlike those at several other AlUla hotels, are reasonable (mains start at $13, for example), part of Dar Tantora's aim to be as popular with area residents as with travelers. *From $600/night. —Nicola Chilton*

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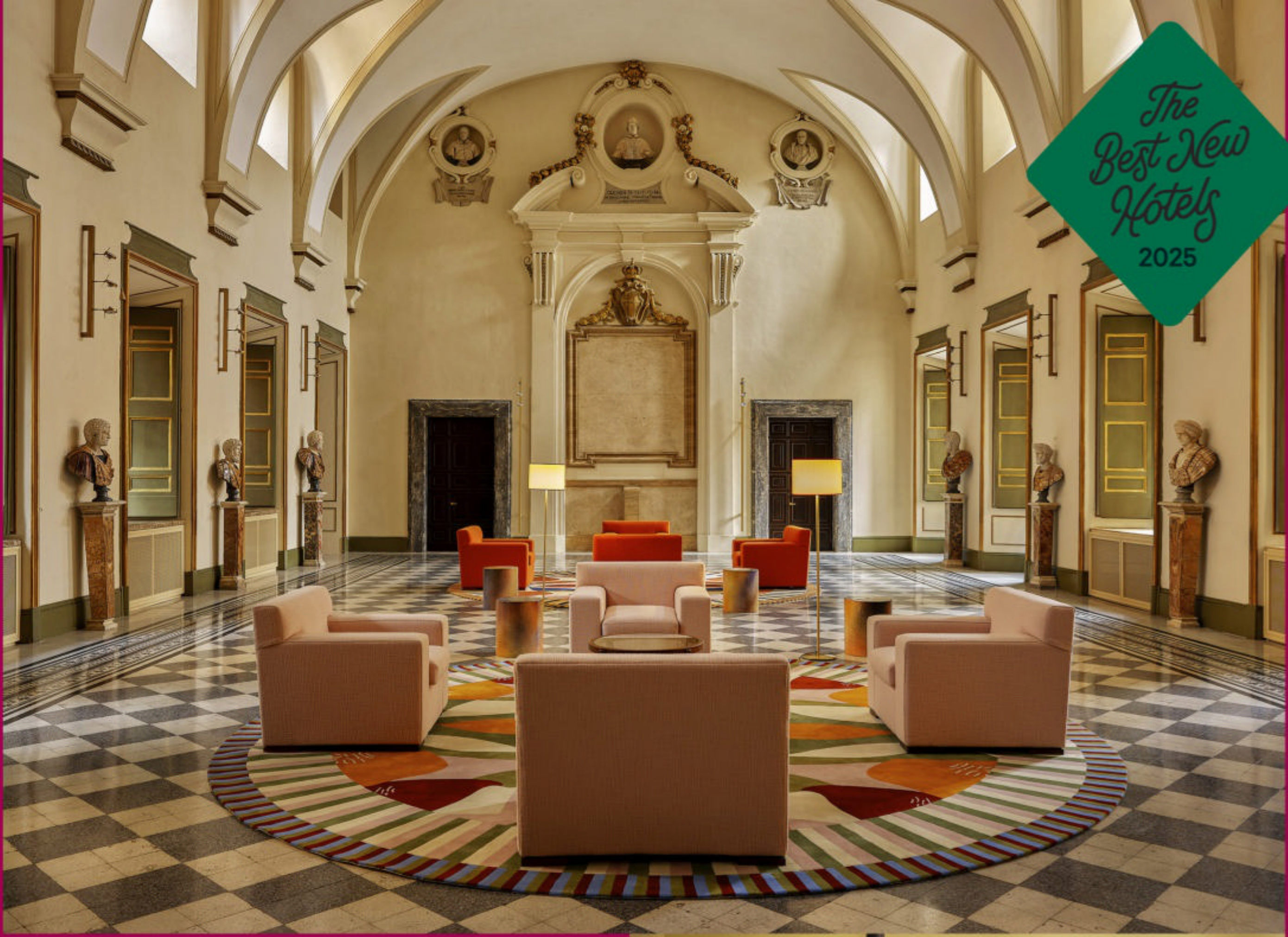

Palazzo Talìa

ROME, ITALY

ROME HAS NO shortage of luxury hotels or historic landmarks, but Palazzo Talìa offers an original blend of both. The first hotel designed by Studio Luca Guadagnino, run by the Italian director of such films as *I Am Love* and *Call Me By Your Name*, Palazzo Talìa is located in the *centro storico* quarter in a restored 16th-century building that was once the residence of the secretary to a Medici pope and then a famous college. Interiors feel grand at some moments and intimate at others. The Aula Magna (Great Hall), for instance, features marble Roman busts and frescoed ceilings, while the 26 accommodations are filled with design details that might include fabric headboards, four-poster beds, or colorful bathroom tiles made on the Amalfi Coast. *From $723/night. —Jennifer Flowers*

COURTESY OF PALAZZO TALÌA

Kibale Lodge

KASENDA, UGANDA

SET ON A RIDGE above a crater lake, the newest lodge from ecotourism company Volcanoes Safaris has an unbeatable location: It's 15 miles west of the visitor center at Kibale National Park, the world primate capital that's home to 13 species, including baboons and bush babies. Founder Praveen Moman, a Uganda native, launched community-focused great ape tourism in Rwanda and Uganda in 1997, and Kibale Lodge completes a circuit of five properties that links the main chimpanzee and gorilla trekking sites. The eight *bandas* (huts) are made with papyrus, red soil, and cow dung, and furnishings include bed frames braided from banana leaf fibers. A portion of the nightly rate goes to Volcanoes Safaris' nonprofit and local programs such as Roots & Shoots, which was developed by the Jane Goodall Institute to teach environmental studies in area schools. *From $990/night, all-inclusive. —Lisa Kadane*

SHAUN S. RITCHIE

The Best New Hotels 2025

Janu Tokyo

TOKYO, JAPAN

TAKING ITS NAME from the Sanskrit word for "soul," Janu Tokyo opened in the up-and-coming Azabudai Hills district last year and marked the first location of a sibling brand to Aman. The 122-room property acts as a more playful (and slightly more affordable) alternative to the hushed and highly private atmosphere that has characterized Aman for nearly four decades. Designer Jean-Michel Gathy and his Kuala Lumpur–based Denniston studio created the interiors, which meld Japanese minimalism with European touches like mirror-covered lobby walls, giant French lampshades, and patterned banquettes. Aman loyalists will recognize brand trademarks, from the ample light and generous use of space to the branded luggage tag attached to your suitcase at checkout. *From $1,062/night. —Chris Schalkx*

CHRIS SCHALKX

Cape Grace

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

OPENED IN 1996, two years after South Africa transitioned to democracy, Cape Grace was the go-to harborside retreat for well-heeled travelers, but over the years its luster began to fade. Now a Fairmont Managed Hotel, it underwent a major rejuvenation by 1508 London—the design studio behind the OWO Residences by Raffles in London—which breathed new life into the 112-room grande dame. Geometric chandeliers in the restaurant and bars add art deco flair, while chesterfields and wingback chairs create inviting nooks in the Library Lounge, which faces a private yacht marina. Here, amid the shelves filled with natural history *objets*, guests can while away an hour with a glass of chenin blanc and a tome on South Africa's one-of-a-kind flora. *From $1,000/night. —Richard Holmes*

Warren Street Hotel

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

WITH ITS TEAL-FRAMED facade and maximalist interiors, the Warren Street Hotel has brightened up a dull corner of Tribeca in lower Manhattan. British design maven and hotelier Kit Kemp collaborated with her daughters on the project, which pushes her signature style in even bolder directions. Each of the 69 residential-feeling rooms and suites is uniquely designed, some in warm reds and fuchsias, others in soothing blues and greens. Public spaces are an exuberant showcase of international art and craft, including Ugandan artist Sanaa Gateja's paper-bead wall hanging and Argentine designer Cristián Mohaded's woven baskets. The all-day Warren Street Bar and Restaurant doubles as a living room for New Yorkers seeking a convivial gathering place. Because it's all in the details, Kemp even designed the Spode china tableware. *From $925/night. —JF*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF CAPE GRACE; COURTESY OF QUENTIN BACON/WARREN STREET HOTEL. OPPOSITE PAGE: COURTESY OF THE LANA, DORCHESTER COLLECTION

The Best New Hotels
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The Lana

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

THE DORCHESTER COLLECTION'S first Middle East hotel has all the hype-worthy features of a city defined by bling: a shimmering, 30-story building by Foster + Partners; a rooftop infinity pool; a sumptuous Dior spa on the 29th floor. But its interiors widely eschew flashiness in favor of calm, confident hospitality. The light-filled lobby's soaring arches and mosaic-covered columns are complemented by gentle grays and pinks, and materials such as alabaster and raw and polished marble. Among the hotel's 50 specially commissioned artworks are Latifa Saeed's glass and sand installations alluding to Dubai's evolution from desert to city. Elegant dining options include a restaurant by celebrated Basque chef Martín Berasategui, a marina-view space for afternoon tea, a speakeasy cigar lounge, and a tiny, bee-themed bar that serves cocktails made with local honey. *From $650/night. —NC*

Flipping the Travel Script

BY LISA KADANE

The nation's first certified autism-friendly destination, Myrtle Beach stars in the new show *Traveling the Spectrum*—and was the backdrop for one of the best mother-son trips this author and her autistic teen have taken.

“I will never forget this vacation,” says Brayden Gielink, a 15-year-old with autism, in *Traveling the Spectrum*, a six-part series about three families living with autism on a trip to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

This heartfelt moment is one of several in the show, launched on Peacock last year, underscoring the difference an inclusive destination can make for neurodiverse travelers.

Already a family-friendly holiday spot, the city became even more welcoming when the **Champion Autism Network** certified Surfside Beach as the country’s first autism-friendly destination in 2016. Staff at participating businesses are trained to assist travelers with sensory, behavior, and communication differences. Visitors also have access to tools that make traveling here easier for those with autism.

Bennett, my teenage son who has autism, and I will always remember our trip to Myrtle Beach when we visited a few years ago. With Bennett, I know how disrupted routines and sensory issues can make travel seem impossible. But I also understand its rewards—making memories and bonding over new experiences—which the series tear-jerkingly illustrates. Myrtle Beach’s autism-supportive environment eased my son and the kids in the series out of their comfort zones in the best possible way.

Nature therapy in the water

As soon as we checked into our **Surfside Beach** vacation house—similar to one featured on the program and perfect for families needing more space—Bennett wanted to play in the waves, just as Gielink did on the show. The gentle break and powdery sand erased the stress of our travel day in seconds, and we smiled in tandem, jumping over wave after wave.

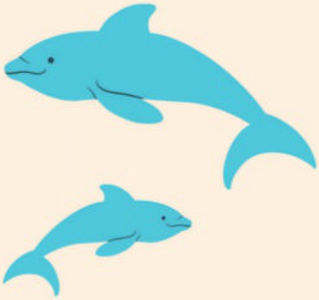
Sensory-friendly wildlife attractions

An animal lover, Bennett was in awe watching playful penguins and toothy sharks at **Ripley’s Aquarium of Myrtle Beach**, a trip highlight for a family on the show, too. The autism-certified facility holds regular sensory days and has a quiet room where anxious visitors can unwind.

Skip lines with Autism Travel Club

We discreetly let staff know we had a neurodiverse family member by simply flashing a card (today you can use the **Autism Travel Club app**) to board the **SkyWheel Myrtle Beach** without waiting in line. Soon, we were high above the boardwalk, enjoying the ride just like two brothers in one of the program’s episodes.

Though my son didn’t verbalize what the experience meant to him, his smiles and peaceful demeanor on our vacation spoke volumes. Like in ***Traveling the Spectrum***, our trip to Myrtle Beach showed us that travel is not only possible for families with autism, it can also be unforgettable.



Watch the show at **TravelingTheSpectrumShow.com**,
then plan your trip at **VisitMyrtleBeach.com**

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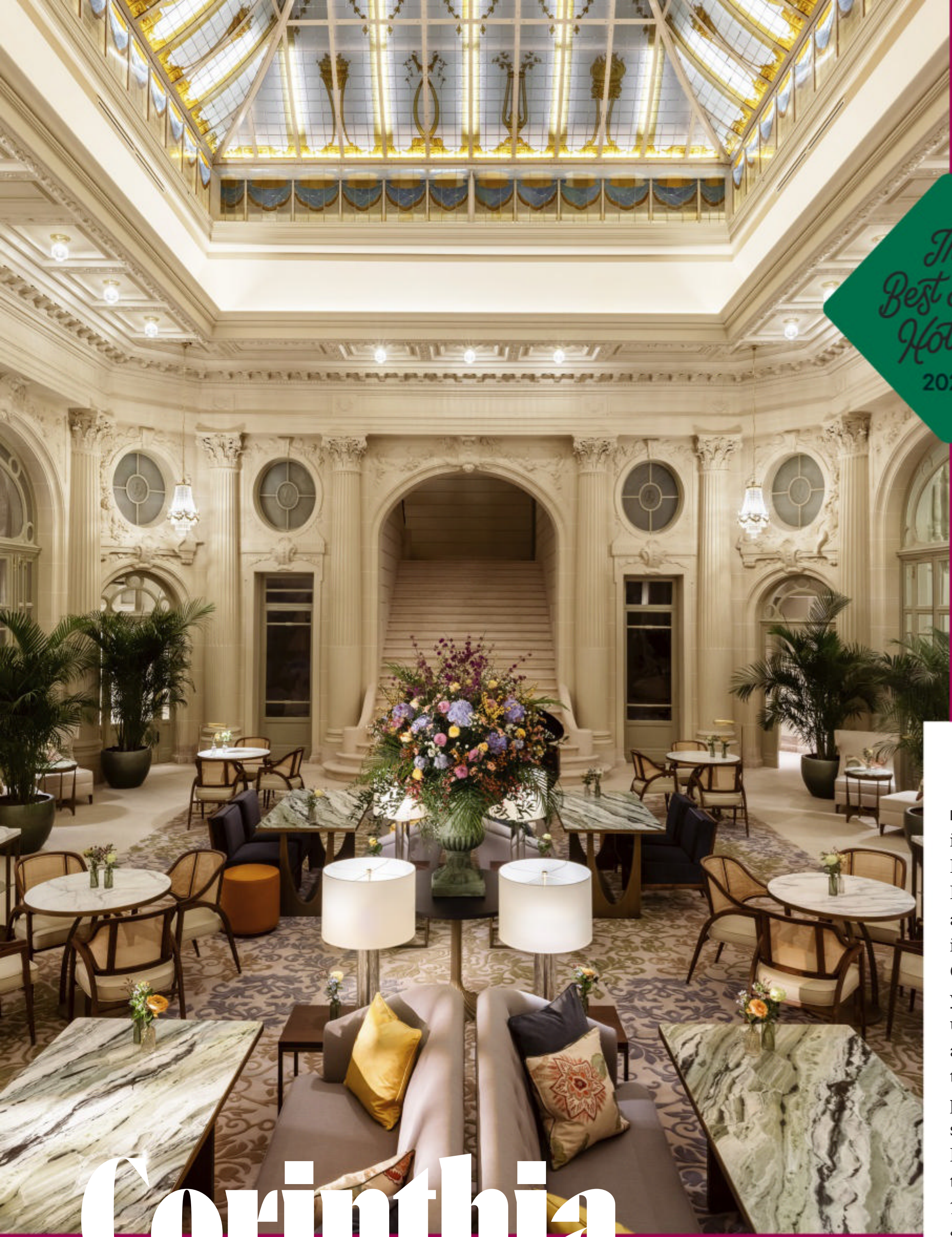
SOUTH CAROLINA



The Best New Hotels 2025

Corinthia Grand Hotel Astoria

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

KING LEOPOLD II of Belgium originally commissioned the Grand Hotel Astoria for the Brussels International Exposition of 1910, and it has hosted icons including Salvador Dalí and Winston Churchill. In December, after four years of painstaking renovations under the guidance of Belgian architect Francis Metzger, Corinthia Hotels finally reopened the property in all its Belle Époque splendor. Guests entering the Palm Court are instantly drawn to the stained-glass dome; the 126 rooms and suites are airy and spacious, with contemporary art, marble bathrooms, and a tastefully regal palette. The hotel also hosts a pair of on-site restaurants from two notable Brussels chefs: David Martin's Palais Royal serves multicourse, Japanese-inflected tasting menus, while Christophe Hardiquest's brasserie-style Le Petit Bon Bon updates comforting Belgian classics. *From $713/night. —Kris Henri Naudts*

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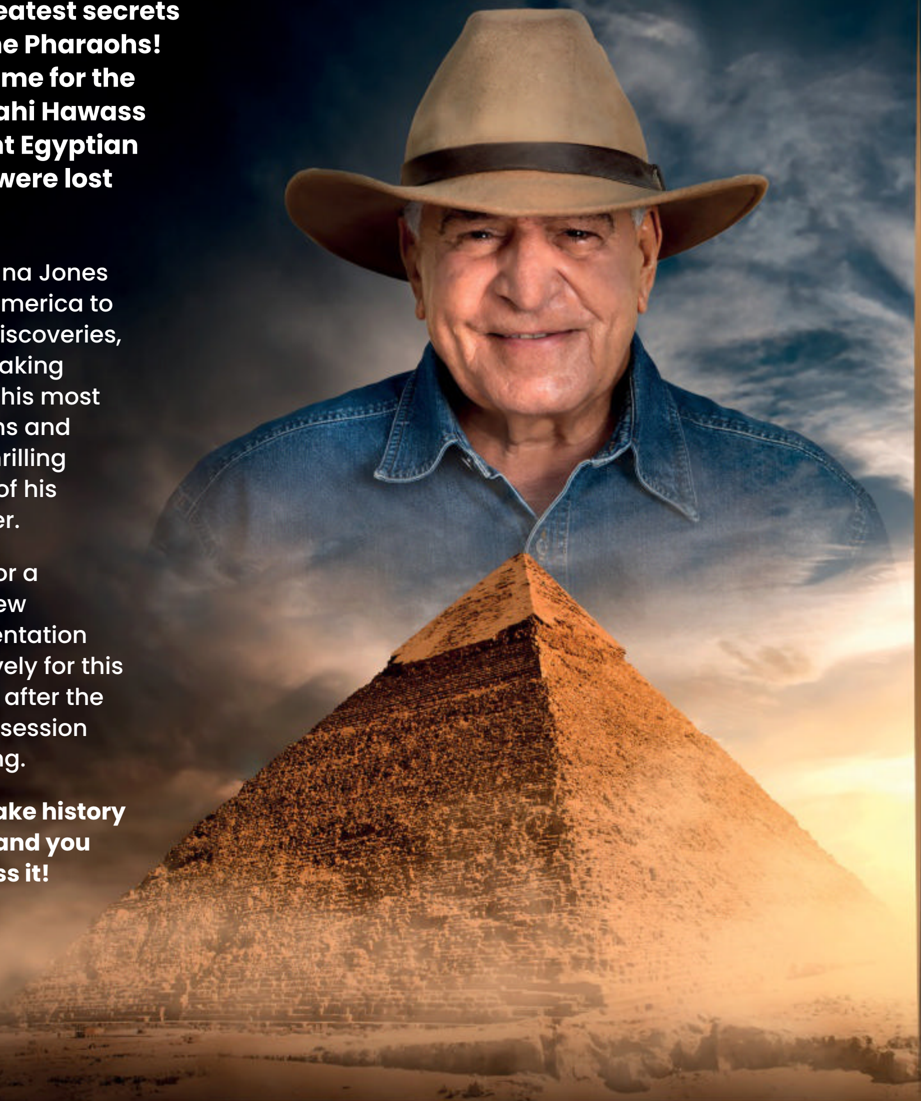

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The Best New Hotels
2025

The Dunlin

JOHNS ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

HUGGING A GENTLE curve in the Kiawah River, this Auberge Resorts Collection retreat sits 35 minutes by car southwest of Charleston yet feels worlds away in its serene marshland setting. The hotel, which opened in August 2024, captures the breezy nostalgia of a vintage coastal summerhouse thanks to designer Amanda Lindroth, who filled the 52 guest rooms and 20 suites with soaking tubs, four-poster beds, and antique birding books. By day, guests can explore the Lowcountry on naturalist-led kayak and boat trips, cycle beneath the moss-draped live oaks, or unwind with an organic facial or glass of wine by the waterfront pool. At sundown, they're invited out to the porch for Southern-inspired cocktail classes highlighting local spirits, before a dinner of warm blue crab dip and buttermilk-fried oysters at the seafood-focused restaurant Linnette's. *From $749/night. —Lauren Mowery*

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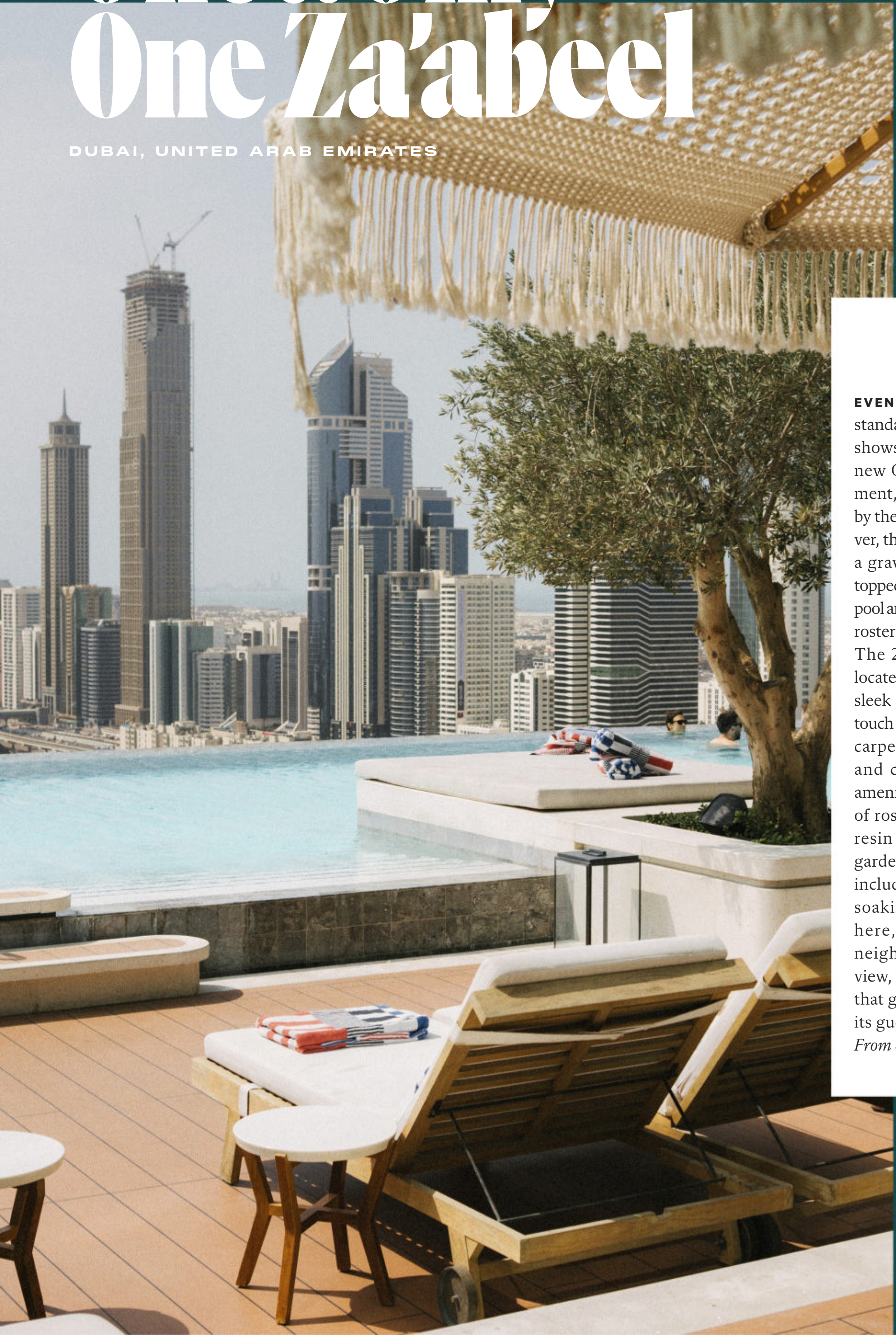
One&Only One Za'abeel

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



EVEN BY DUBAI'S sky-high standards, the One&Only is a showstopper: It's part of the new One Za'abeel development, two towers connected by the world's longest cantilever, the 750-foot-long Link—a gravity-defying structure topped by a spectacular infinity pool and home to an impressive roster of bars and restaurants. The 229 rooms and suites, located on floors 38 to 53, are sleek and uncluttered, with a touch of warmth from textured carpets, silky-soft bedding, and custom-blended bath amenities scented with notes of rose, saffron, and gurjun resin that conjure Arabian gardens. Many of the rooms include deep, window-front soaking tubs, and from up here, without immediate neighbors obstructing the view, there's a sense of space that gives the building—and its guests—room to breathe. *From $600/night. —NC*

FEDERICO CIAMEI

Tawana

MOREMI GAME RESERVE, BOTSWANA

THE MOREMI GAME RESERVE embraces the crystalline channels of the Okavango Delta, game-rich grasslands, and mopani forests. For its new camp, the conservation-minded safari company Natural Selection entered into a rare partnership with Tawana Moremi, paramount chief of the Batawana tribe, whose father and grandmother were instrumental in creating the reserve. The lodge takes design cues from the local customs and setting, from the organic palette in its eight suites to the covered walkway at the entrance modeled on *yikuku* fish traps used by the Mbukushu people. This is the only camp to be granted access to a 130-acre concession in this virtually unvisited stretch of the park, meaning guests mostly have the toothy, wild residents (such as lions, leopards, elephants, and hippos) all to themselves. *From $2,195 per person/night. —RH*

The Best New Hotels 2025

Dusit Thani

BANGKOK, THAILAND

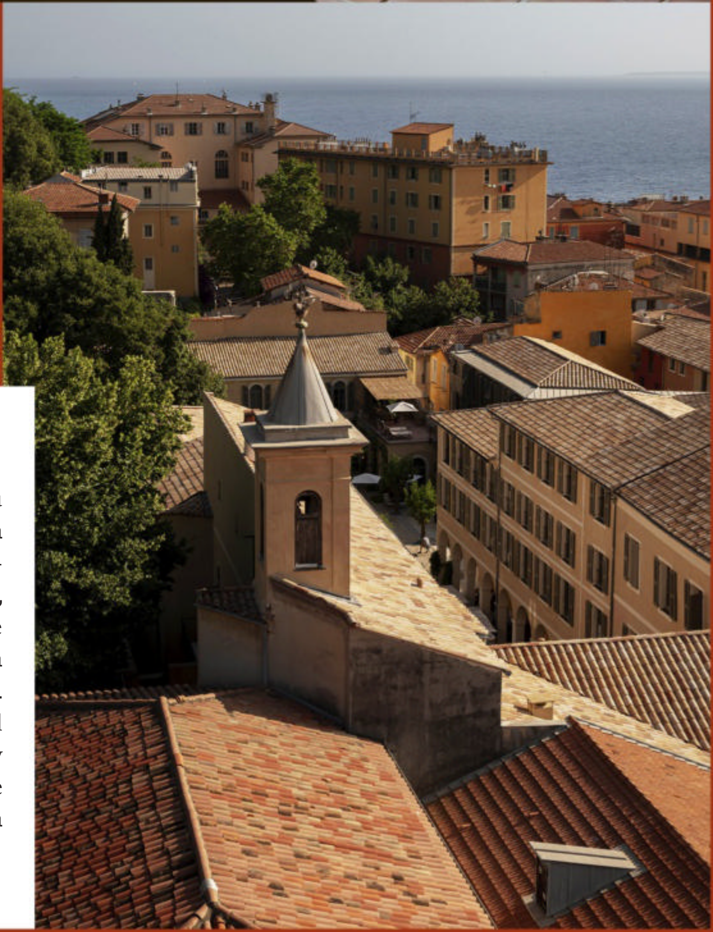
DEVOTEES OF Dusit Thani Bangkok let out a sigh of relief when their beloved gathering spot on the edge of Lumpini Park reopened last September after a five-year, billion-dollar transformation. A 1970s-era icon, the hotel returned with half the number of rooms (257, down from 517), which were doubled in size and modernized with interiors by Hong Kong–born architect André Fu. The old guard will recognize the hallmark golden roof spire and the lobby's handpainted columns preserved from the original Benjarong restaurant. But a new retro-themed sky bar, a fine dining spot by celebrated Italian chef Umberto Bombana, and a fleet of e-hybrid Porsches for airport transfers (for guests staying in club rooms or suites) prove the hotel is ready for the next generation. *From $504/night. —CS*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF NATURAL SELECTION; COURTESY OF DUSIT THANI BANGKOK

The Best New Hotels 2025

Hôtel du Couvent

NICE, FRANCE



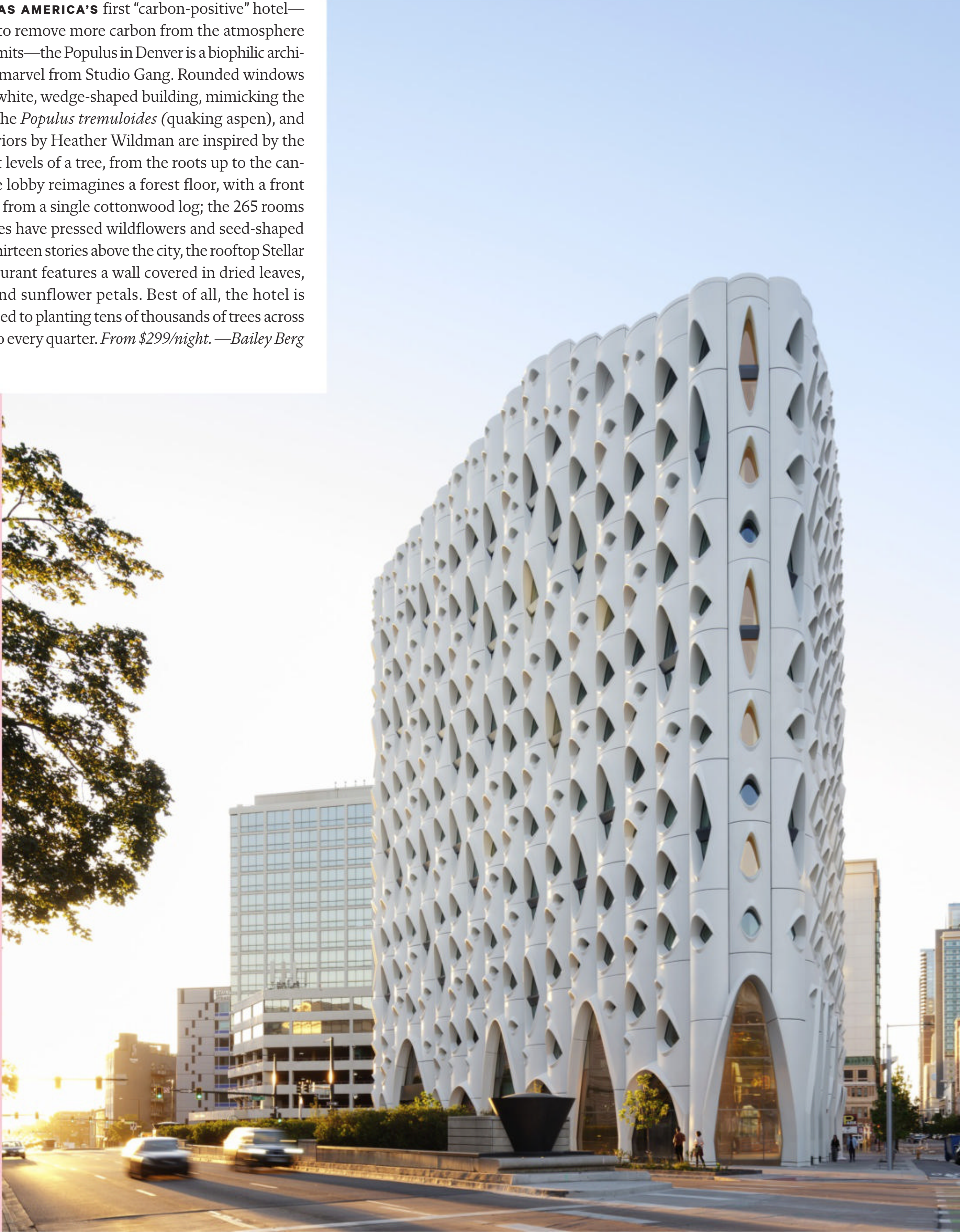
SET ON A hillside in pastel-hued Old Nice, the 88-room Hôtel du Couvent, a Luxury Collection Hotel, opened in June 2024 in a former 17th-century convent. The stone floors and minimalist interiors may have a monastic feel, but the nuns never had beds so comfy, towels so fluffy, or Roman-style thermal baths so enticing. The cloister houses an herbalist doling out tisanes and tinctures and a boulangerie producing sourdough loaves from flour milled on-site. Stylish locals, accompanied by their equally stylish dogs, sip natural wines and dine in the orange tree–filled courtyard on deliciously unfussy food (stuffed cabbage, red gnocchi with sage), much of it made with ingredients from the hotel's own farm. Terraced gardens lead to a pool with views over the Mediterranean. *From $405/night. —NC*

GIULIO GHIRARDI

Populus

DENVER, COLORADO

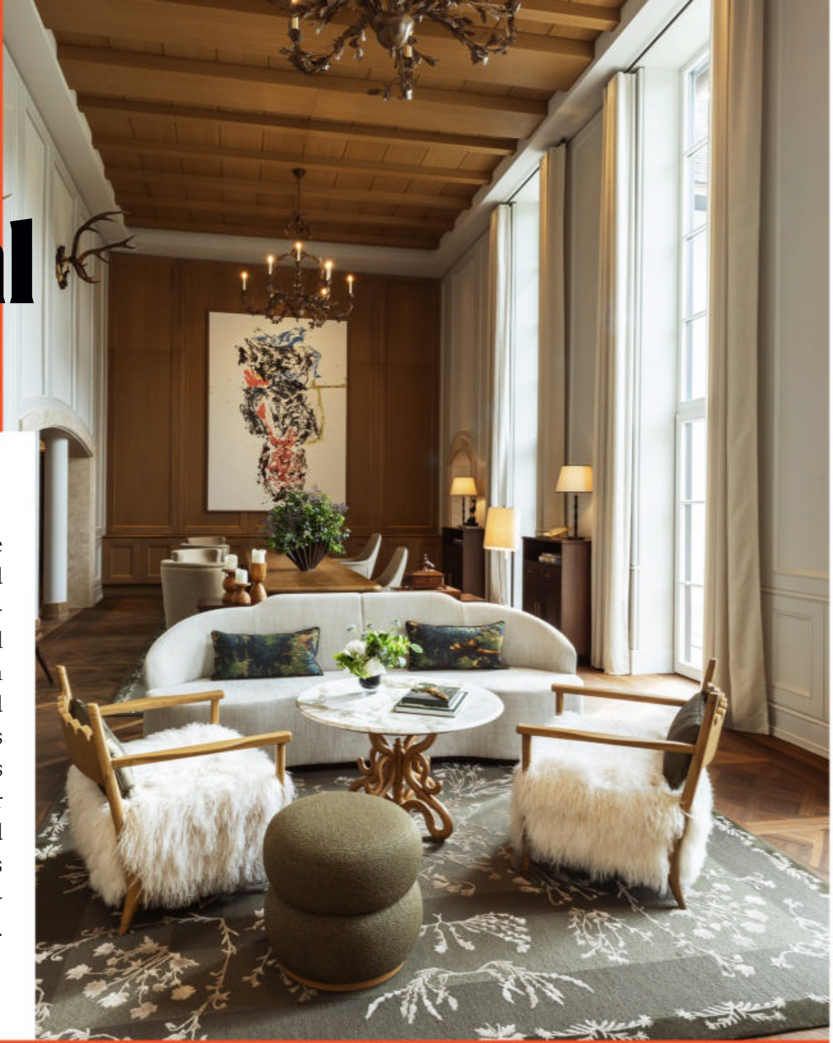
BILLED AS AMERICA'S first "carbon-positive" hotel—vowing to remove more carbon from the atmosphere than it emits—the Populus in Denver is a biophilic architectural marvel from Studio Gang. Rounded windows dot the white, wedge-shaped building, mimicking the bark of the *Populus tremuloides* (quaking aspen), and the interiors by Heather Wildman are inspired by the different levels of a tree, from the roots up to the canopy. The lobby reimagines a forest floor, with a front desk cut from a single cottonwood log; the 265 rooms and suites have pressed wildflowers and seed-shaped vases. Thirteen stories above the city, the rooftop Stellar Jay restaurant features a wall covered in dried leaves, herbs, and sunflower petals. Best of all, the hotel is committed to planting tens of thousands of trees across Colorado every quarter. *From $299/night. —Bailey Berg*



JASON O'REAR

Rosewood Schloss Fuschl

HOF BEI SALZBURG, AUSTRIA



BUILT IN 1461 as a royal hunting lodge, this Alpine castle outside of Salzburg became a hotel after World War II and played a starring role in the *Sissi* film trilogy, about 19th-century Empress Elisabeth of Austria. The Rosewood Hotel Group redesigned and reopened the property last July with 98 guest rooms and an eclectic mix of modern glamour and historic details: Mounted antlers and old master paintings share space with contemporary art such as Georg Baselitz's upside-down portrait of his wife. Outside, guests can fish or take a sunset cruise on sparkling Lake Fuschl, go on guided hikes, or forage with an herbalist. Suitably, the hotel pays homage to the empress in numerous ways, from a signature suite to a turndown cookie in the shape of her pet deer. *From $650/night. —Mary Winston Nicklin*

The Best New Hotels 2025

Six Senses La Sagesse

ST. DAVID, GRENADA

THE VOLCANIC ISLAND of Grenada has remained a peaceful spot thanks to having relatively fewer visitors than its tourist-heavy neighbors—making it an ideal locale for the sustainability-minded, wellness-centric Six Senses brand to dip its toes into Caribbean waters. The resort opened in April 2024 with 56 pool suites and 15 villas clustered on hills overlooking the sea. Classes range from sound bath healing to aerial yoga, with personal training sessions available, too; the spa is equipped with pools, a sauna, a steam room, and suspended swinging chairs perfect for an after-treatment snooze. Befitting Grenada's reputation as the Spice Island, the Alchemy Bar teaches guests how to make their own facial scrub using ingredients like cinnamon, nutmeg, cacao, and clove—a fragrant souvenir. *From $700/night. —Heather Greenwood Davis*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF ROSEWOOD SCHLOSS FUSCHL; COURTESY OF SIX SENSES LA SAGESSE

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The Best New Hotels 2025

Waldorf Astoria Seychelles Platte Island

PLATTE ISLAND, SEYCHELLES

FROM THE WINDOW on the turboprop plane transfer from Mahé (the largest island in the Seychelles), private Platte Island comes into view as a palm-tufted speck ringed by bone-white beaches. This former coconut plantation is the site of the new Waldorf Astoria, which opened in January 2024 and comprises 50 one- to five-bedroom villas, each with its own tropical garden and pool. Zigzagging rooftops nod to hawksbill turtle shells, and the beach house–style interiors have beds fringed by gauzy drapes bound with sisal rope and breezy bathrooms with terrazzo floors made from shell splinters and mother-of-pearl. The Indian Ocean is visible through the gardens' palms, but beach access from the villas is purposefully obstructed—the resort's way of making sure not to disturb the nearly 300 sea turtle nests lining the shore. *From $1,558/night. —CS*

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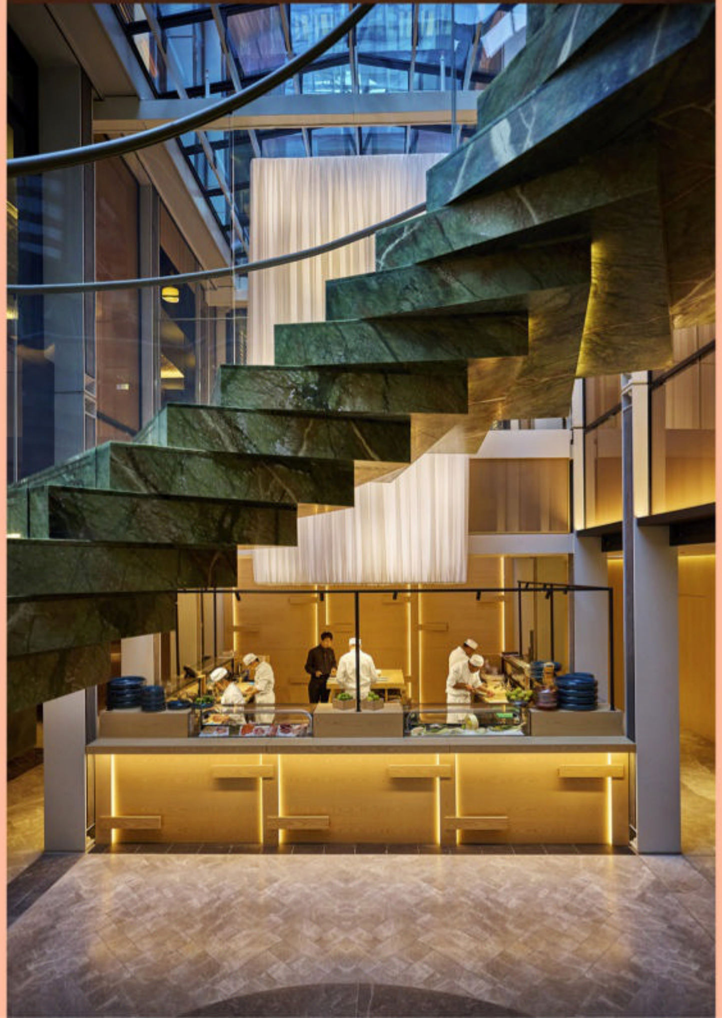

The Best New Hotels 2025

Mandarin Oriental Mayfair, London

LONDON, ENGLAND

IN A QUIET corner of one of England's most prestigious postcodes, the Mandarin Oriental Mayfair, London blends understated opulence and contemporary design with details like a Ming green marble staircase and an undulating wooden sculpture inspired by the movement of the wind. With just 50 rooms and suites, the Hanover Square hotel caters to travelers who crave a more personal hospitality experience. Tokyo firm Curiosity designed the public areas, while London's Studio Indigo was responsible for the accommodations, which were decorated with nods to nature, including de Gournay handpainted silk wallpaper with branches of delicate blossoms. Kids will love playful touches such as teddy bears dressed in cardigans bearing the Mandarin Oriental fan logo. *From $1,243/night. —Sara Hamdan*

COURTESY OF MANDARIN ORIENTAL MAYFAIR, LONDON

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The Best New Hotels
2025

Sandals St. Vincent and the Grenadines

BUCCAMENT, ST. VINCENT

SANDALS HAS BEEN a Caribbean fixture for more than four decades, but its new location on rainforested St. Vincent is a game-changing step forward—“Sandals 2.0,” if you will. Its 301 rooms offer thoughtful design (natural wood, handwoven rugs), and guests who book Butler Elite accommodations have access to unpacking services and a private island cruise. Equally noteworthy are the 11 restaurants, such as Buccan, where diners enjoy a menu of Vincentian ingredients (breadfruit, mahi-mahi) that are cooked in *yabba* pots over cedarwood and coconut husks, and served with calabash bowls of spices and chutneys. Don’t miss Three Jewels Rum Bar, which has vinyl records, domino tables, and a 32-rum menu in which two-thirds of the offerings are distilled in the eastern Caribbean. *From $500 per person/night, all-inclusive. —HGD*

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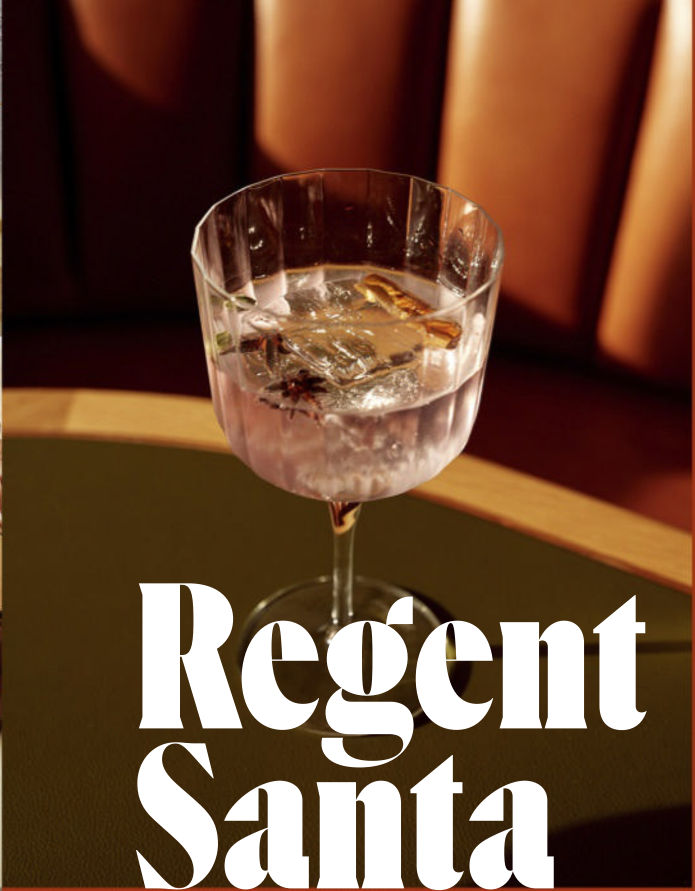


Regent Santa Monica Beach

SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

The Best New Hotels 2025

AFTER A 32-YEAR ABSENCE, the Regent hospitality brand made its grand return to American shores last fall with this modern Santa Monica outpost, set just across the street from Muscle Beach—and even in a town known for great hotels, it's a knockout. The Pacific Ocean subtly makes its way into the decor of the 167 guest rooms and suites, where rugs and table lamps in muted greens and turquoise evoke kelp forests, and fluffy robes feature green seashell prints. At Orla by Michael Mina, under a handpainted octopus on the ceiling, the James Beard Award–winning chef draws on his Egyptian heritage in dishes that include prawns wrapped in *kataifi* (shredded phyllo) and Urfa-pepper-dusted bigeye tuna. In December, the hotel also welcomed the West Coast's only Guerlain spa. *From $1,100/night. —Tim Chester*

THIS PAGE: CODY JAMES. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: CYRILLE ROBIN/ ROYAL MANSOUR CASABLANCA; DAVID LOFTUS

Royal Mansour Casablanca

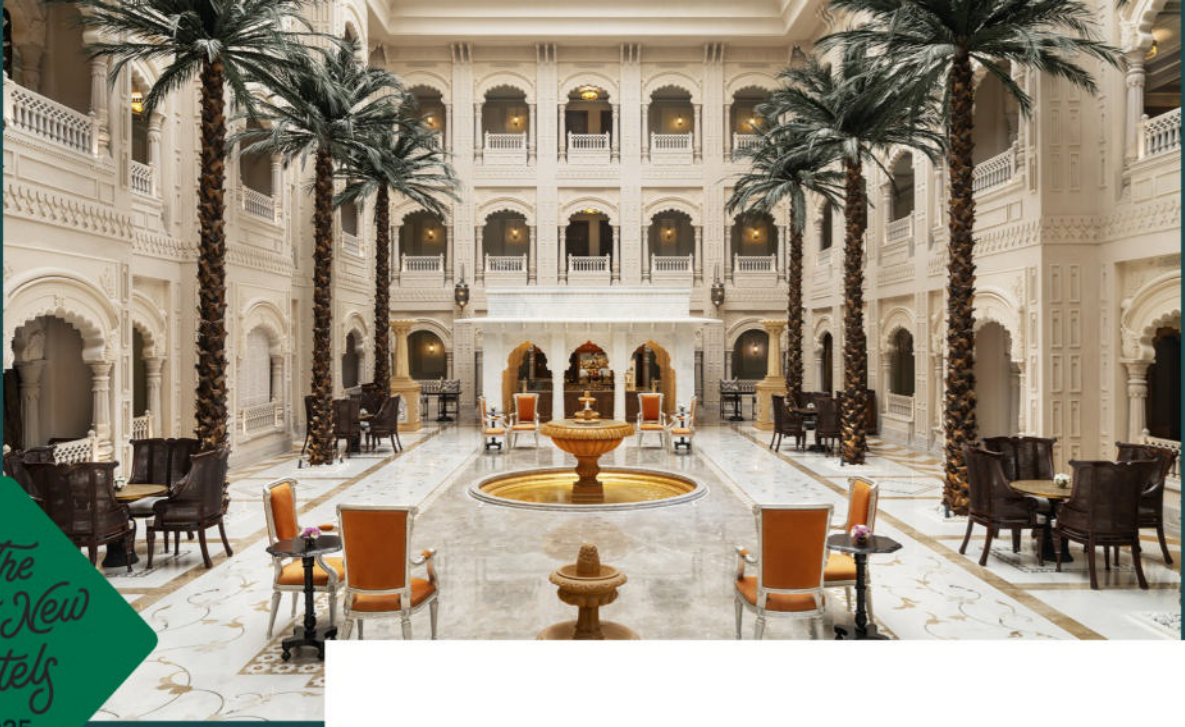
CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

LONG OVERLOOKED BY travelers rushing to Marrakech and Fez, Casablanca has a new reason to stop and stay awhile: a stylish reimagining of the city's first luxury hotel, which just happens to be owned by King Mohammed VI. Befitting its location near the art deco district, the 149-room Royal Mansour Casablanca trades out the traditional Moroccan style of its sister property in Marrakech for a mid-century modern vibe that also reflects the city's port history, with soft carpets made from recycled fishing nets and an aquarium with thousands of fish. Traditional hammam treatments using Taliouine saffron, rose water, and *ghassoul* clay are performed in the spa, and cuts and beard trims are offered at Le Salon Barbier, designed by celebrity French barber Sarah Hamizi. *From $650/night. —NC*

The Potlatch Club

ELEUTHERA, THE BAHAMAS

A GROUP OF East Coast socialites opened the Potlatch Club in 1967, and soon after that, its pink-sand shores welcomed celebrities such as Paul McCartney, who wrote "She Came In Through the Bathroom Window" while honeymooning here. Closed in the 1980s, the hotel sat abandoned until 2016, when two business partners started the process of bringing it back to life. They kept some of the original structures, including the 1923 Clubhouse, but 10 of the 11 cottages, suites, and villas are new, with a retro Bahamian vibe of pink coral floors and splashes of rattan. There's a small but mighty spa and two pools—one overlooking the ocean, the other set in a secluded garden—and the Sand Bar serves up classic Bahamian cocktails (think rum-based Goombay Smashes) and uninterrupted sea views. *From $850/night. —Laura Begley Bloom*



The Best New Hotels 2025

Raffles Jaipur

JAIPUR, INDIA

WHEN GUESTS ARRIVE at Raffles Jaipur, a doorman in a Rajasthani turban greets them at a gold-accented shikar tent and leads them to the majestic Great Hall, where celestial golden birds—a symbol of good luck—populate a painted domed ceiling. Opened in July 2024, India's second Raffles location makes a dramatic first impression, which perfectly captures the spirit of this city known for its ornate palaces and forts. The 50-room retreat is styled after a zenana, or women's quarters, with latticed interior balconies and niches from which a royal might gaze upon happenings below. Hand-cut marble floors dominate public spaces filled with scalloped archways and intricate moldings, while each of the jewel box–like guest rooms is a fantasy of canopied beds, camel bone inlay furniture, and silky hand-knotted rugs. *From $650/night. —Kathryn Romeyn*

Four Seasons Hotel Osaka

OSAKA, JAPAN

THINK OF THE Four Seasons Hotel Osaka as two hotels in one: 154 rooms are Western-style, done up in muted tones inspired by spices, while the 28th floor houses Gensui, the city's first urban ryokan, with 21 rooms lined with tatami mats and bedding from 450-year-old brand Nishikawa. On the 36th floor is a spa with *ofuros* (traditional baths), a sauna, and a 52-foot-long infinity pool that looks out over Osaka Castle in the distance. Four Seasons adds to the city's impressive culinary lineup with Jiang Nan Chun, a Cantonese restaurant serving dim sum at lunchtime, and Sushi L'Abysse Osaka, a partnership between French chef Yannick Alléno and Japanese chef Itaru Yasuda, who pair French bites with unique twists on sushi and low-waste ingenuity, such as wasabi peel simmered in soy sauce as a garnish for sashimi. *From $850/night. —Yukari Sakamoto*

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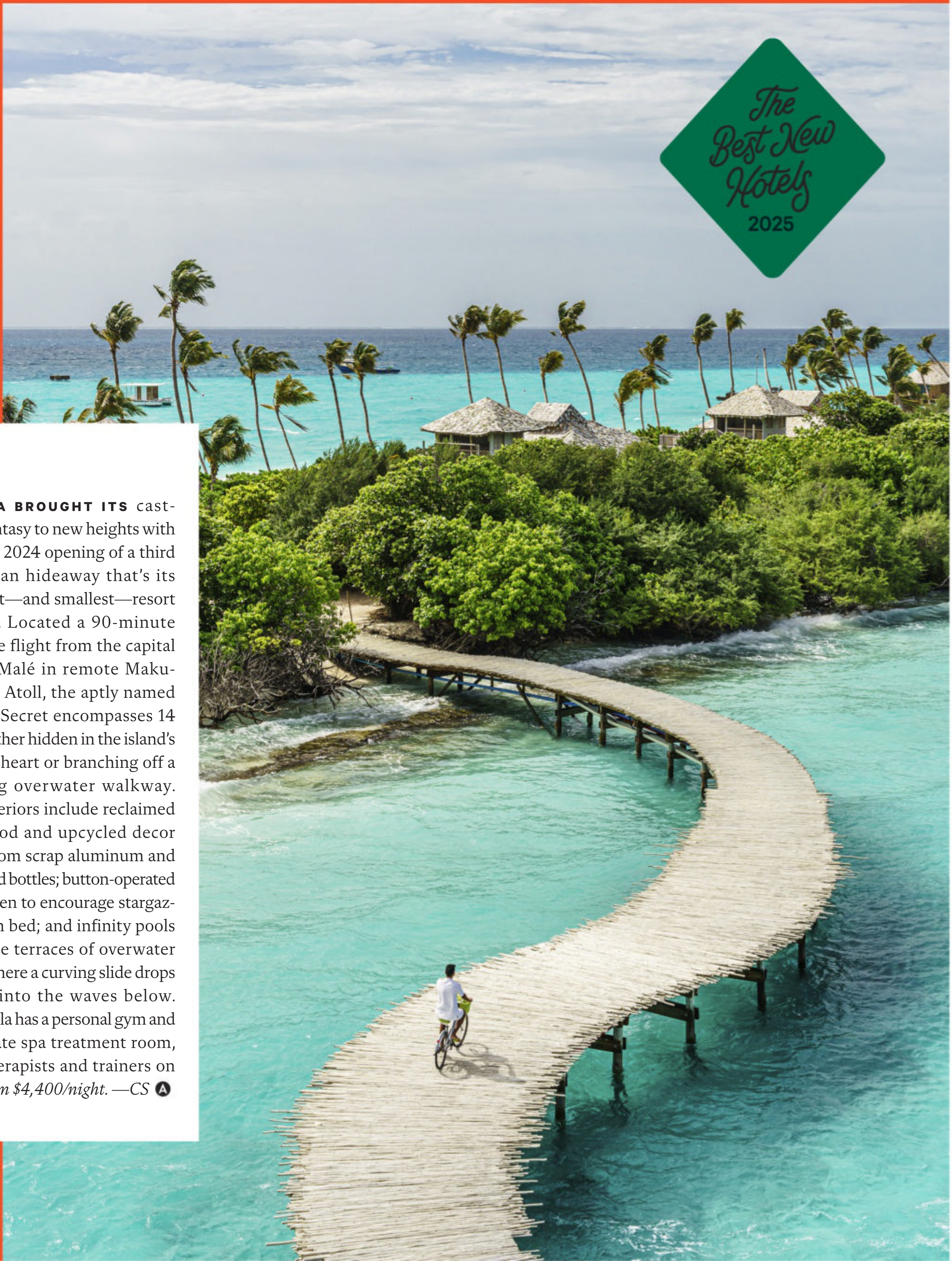
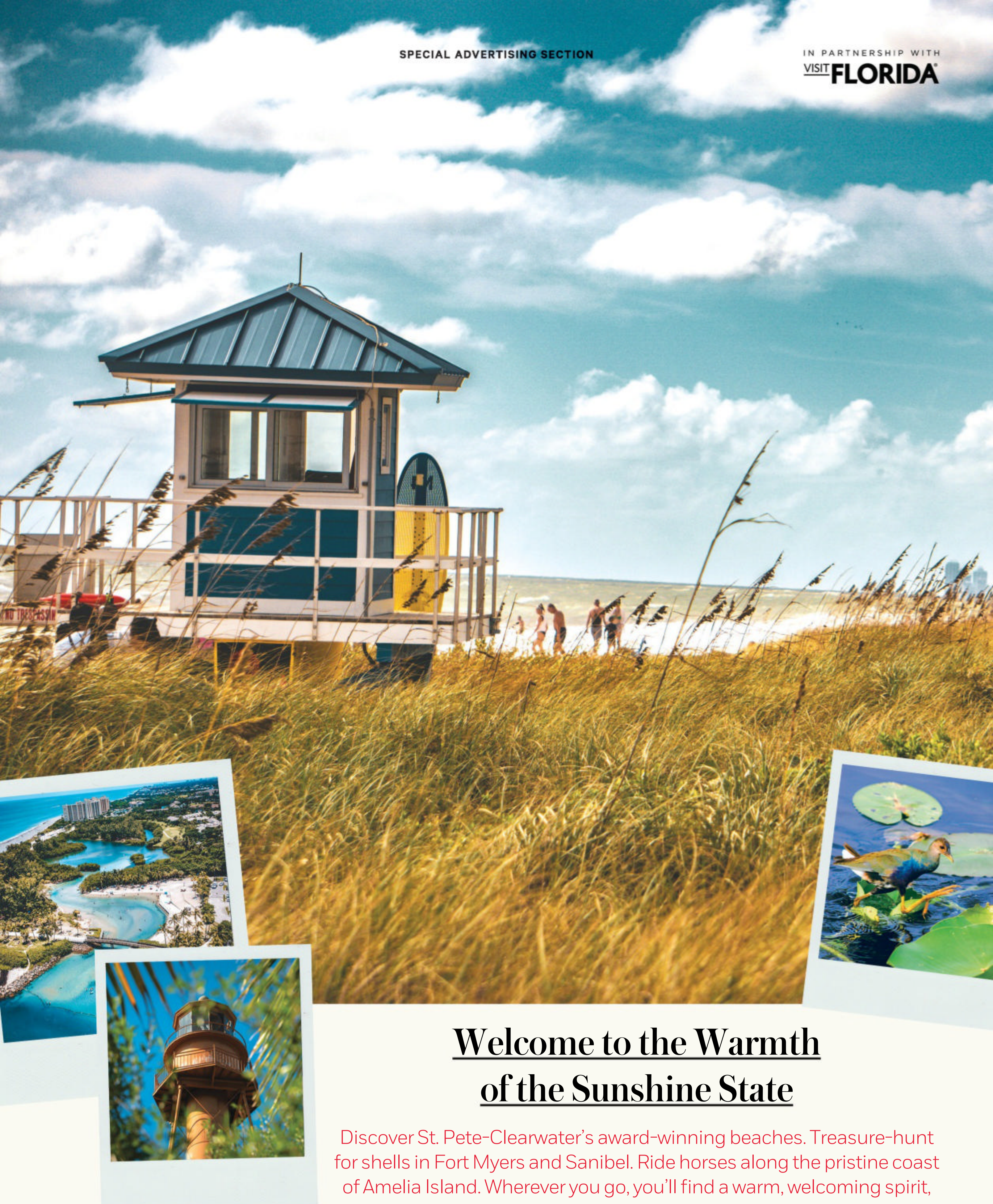
Soneva Secret

MAKUNUDHOO ATOLL, MALDIVES



SONEVA BROUGHT ITS castaway fantasy to new heights with the May 2024 opening of a third Maldivian hideaway that's its grandest—and smallest—resort to date. Located a 90-minute seaplane flight from the capital city of Malé in remote Makunudhoo Atoll, the aptly named Soneva Secret encompasses 14 villas, either hidden in the island's jungled heart or branching off a winding overwater walkway. Airy interiors include reclaimed driftwood and upcycled decor made from scrap aluminum and discarded bottles; button-operated roofs open to encourage stargazing from bed; and infinity pools flank the terraces of overwater villas, where a curving slide drops guests into the waves below. Every villa has a personal gym and a separate spa treatment room, with therapists and trainers on call. *From $4,400/night.* —CS

CHRIS SCHALKX



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Book a stay at the **Vinoy Resort & Golf Club**, an Autograph Collection property in downtown St. Pete, and you'll be well-situated along a walkable stretch of bars and restaurants on the picturesque Tampa Bay waterfront. Savor fresh seafood at the new restaurant **Juno & The Peacock** and craft cocktails at another recent debut, **Pluma Lounge**.

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There are many ways to explore and unwind on Florida's northeast coast.

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Book a romantic retreat or friends' getaway at the elegant **Fairbanks House** (FairbanksHouse.com), delight in concierge service and luxurious touches at **The Addison on Amelia Island** (AddisononAmelia.com), and experience warm hospitality at the **Blue Heron Inn** (VisitBlueHeron.com), a turn-of-the-century home with restored pine floors. You'll be steps away from the shopping, dining, breweries, and live music of historic downtown Fernandina Beach at all these properties.

Or check into the **Omni Amelia Island Resort & Spa** (OmniHotels.com/AmeliaIsland), an oceanfront property with Northeast Florida's largest pool deck, championship golf, a renowned spa, and endless dining options.

Discover more at **AmeliaIsland.com**

Photos clockwise: Custom-designed mini catamarans off Amelia Island, The Addison on Amelia Island, Fairbanks House, Omni Amelia Island Resort & Spa, Blue Heron Inn

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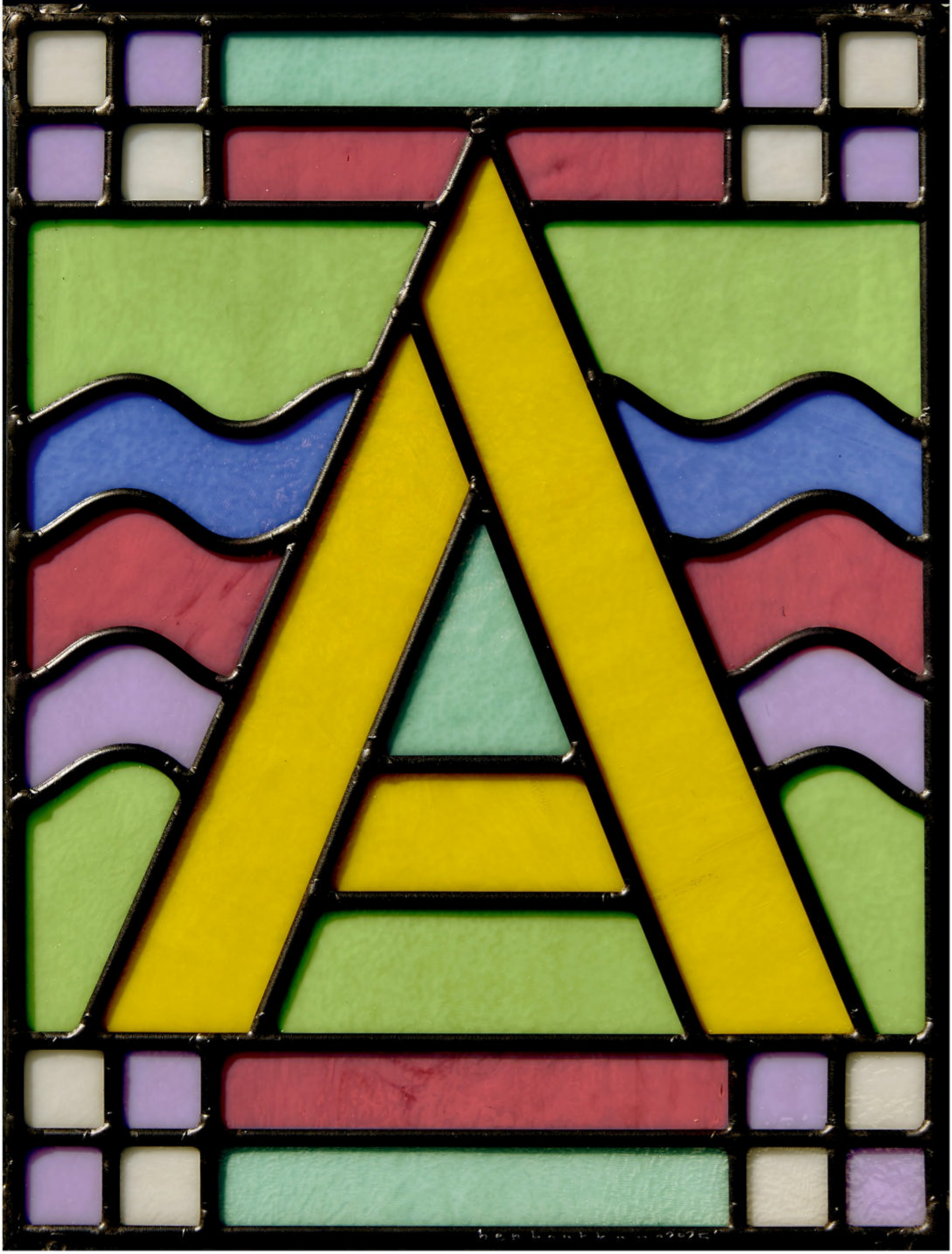

Art by **BEN HOUTKAMP**

IN

On a family visit to Guangzhou, China, writer
Bonnie Tsui 徐靈鳳 sees the city—
and her relationship with her father—in a new light.

FRAME

Photographs by

AN RONG XU
許安榮

FROM MY AIRPLANE WINDOW,

the Pearl River unfurled from fogged mountains in a glossy, pale-blue ribbon, a magisterial curve of water that defined the landscape with its flow. I found myself craning my head to follow the river's path as it wound past small towns and big factories. Several squiggles later, it ran under a series of bridges, moving in and out of view. If I squinted at the scene just so, it looked like something out of time, a misty morning painted on a scroll.

As the plane began its descent into Baiyun International Airport—the busiest airport in China, handling more than 76 million passengers in 2024—the greenery gave way to concrete and skyscrapers, and the fog started to look a lot more like smog. That a classical-era landscape still existed here in Guangzhou, of course, was a romantic thought.

The port city on the Maritime Silk Road was once known to Westerners as Canton, where China first opened to the wider world—and by 1757, it was the only Chinese port where foreign trade was permitted. Guangzhou is today one of the most populated metropolitan areas on Earth. Sitting beside me on the flight was my younger son, Teddy, 11, who pressed his face against the window, his bright eyes already taking in all the details and contradictions. He had visited Guangzhou just once, as a plump-cheeked toddler, but had no memory of the place. He asked me if we could take a photo of the river, so he could sketch it later.

My own first trip to Guangzhou took place almost 20 years ago, after my parents divorced and my father moved from New York back to Hong Kong, where he was born, and then to mainland China. Every couple of years I make my way to Guangzhou to visit him; every time, I observe seismic changes to the skyline. As an international center of trade and manufacturing, the city is constantly reinventing itself, looking toward the future.

Opposite page: In Guangzhou, 147 buildings greater than 656 feet high were completed in 2022, contributing to the city's evolving skyline.

Pages 76–77: Guangzhou's population was one million in 1950. Today, it has a population of around 15 million.

The trips to Guangzhou punctuated my life at key junctures: as a recent college graduate working at a magazine in New York; as a just-married writer who'd moved to San Francisco; as an anxious young mother flying with two children under four; as a dutiful daughter who, for many years, decided that maybe it was just easier to make the journey alone.

I haven't always loved coming to Guangzhou, because coming to Guangzhou meant that I was once again the one to make the long trip to see my dad, an artist whose work hangs in Beijing's Guanfu Museum, the first private art museum in China. That painting, a large-scale oil portrait on salvaged wood, merges Western techniques he'd perfected in America with classical-period Chinese subject matter, and it marked his departure from commercial work for the world of fine art. In my mind, the painting also marked his departure from my mother, my brother, and me, as an intact family.

After he'd left, when I was a teenager, I resented the fact that I never knew when I'd see him again; as an adult, I was resentful that I always had to be the one to come to him. In the past, this sense of duty meant that I didn't really appreciate Guangzhou for all that it was, in part because my father lives something of a hermetic existence; we'd always prioritized homebody experiences over getting out to explore the city.

This time, though, with Teddy as a fledgling artist who had started exchanging artwork with my father via text message, it felt right to bring him along. Over the next five days, maybe my son could help me see Guangzhou, and his grandfather, in a different light.

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Shanghai
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East China Sea
东海
GUANGZHOU
广州
TAIWAN
台灣
Hong Kong
香港
South China Sea
南海

“IN GUANGZHOU, THEY’RE ALWAYS building and making something new,” my stepmother remarked the next morning during a taxi ride around the city. The sense that things could pop up overnight was evident; the swirling copper infinity circles of Infinitus Plaza, completed by Zaha Hadid Architects during the pandemic, were an experiment in green roof and rainwater harvesting systems. (The late Hadid also designed the iconic Guangzhou Opera House, one of her first projects in China.) My father pointed out the Canton Tower, a twisting, 112-story structure built in 2010 that was for a few years the tallest building in the world, and the Guangzhou Circle building, which looked to me like a giant piece of alien currency: a 33-story gold coin with a hole in the middle. “It’s like a glittery gold doughnut!” Teddy exclaimed, taking his one-millionth photo of the morning.

Our destination was the recently opened Guangdong Museum of Art, situated in a soaring cultural complex that resembles a cubist cruise ship docked along the Pearl River.

Inside, one exhibit presented prominent artists from Guangzhou alongside peers from Beijing and Shanghai, part of a national effort to recognize Guangdong Province’s position at the frontier of globalization and artistic innovation. The booming art scene in the Pearl River Delta region dates to the 1990s, when the first wave of transformation was brought on by Communist leader Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms. In front of an oil painting of a pink-suited man wearing a stylized white mask, I paused in recognition—it was by Zeng Fanzhi, one of China’s most celebrated artists, with whom my father once had a gallery show in Beijing. Seeing the piece, my father remarked with a laugh, “We showed our work together back then—he’s very famous now, but I’m not!”

Unlike most other museums in China, the Guangdong Museum of Art has English signage in its exhibits. At the time of our visit, it had been open for just six months and was still a work in progress; the café and gift shop weren’t completely operational, and audio guides were limited to Chinese. But one 12-part video, *Building a Museum*, managed to capture the scale of ambition that drives such a massive enterprise: From 2020 to 2022, the performance artist Li Binyuan joined the initial construction of the museum, working on-site as a laborer by day and performing dramatic pieces alone after hours, recording both identities in the process.

As I watched my father—pensive in front of some artwork, and posing for funny photos with Teddy in front of others—I was reminded that we contain multitudes.

From left: The Guangdong Museum of Art is free to visit; Nanxin Milk Desserts Expert has been in business for 90 years; Shamian Island is within walking distance of Guangzhou Metro’s Huangsha Station.

THERE’S A STEREOTYPE in China that while people from Shanghai spend all their money on fashion, people from Guangzhou spend all their money on food. In the mid-19th century, the Cantonese were the intrepid immigrants who left

Guangdong Province for California; theirs was the diaspora that established the first Chinatowns and introduced such beloved traditional foods as dim sum, barbecued roast pork, and wonton noodle soup to America—and the world.

But Cantonese food in China goes beyond these staples. The next day, before the subtropical heat hit its lunchtime peak, we headed to the narrow lanes and pedestrian arcades of the city's historic Liwan District on a pilgrimage to Nanxin Milk Desserts Expert. A famous dessert house first opened in 1934, it occupies two stories of a landmark building. A host led us up the curving staircase to a table by the window, where we ordered an array of hot and cold Cantonese dessert soups: ginger buffalo-milk custard, sweet red bean, silky tofu pudding with syrup, chunky mango with grapefruit pearl. My father's longtime favorite has always been the black sesame soup—the paste smooth and dark as night, served hot—topped by chewy, ping-pong ball–size rice dumplings filled with sweet peanut paste. Teddy threw back two bowls of the mango soup and a plate of shrimp dumplings, sautéed local greens, and beef rice noodles—and asked if we could come back the next day. (We did.)

Not far from Liwan, on another morning, we went for a stroll on manicured Shamian Island, a public park where the first British and French concessions for foreign merchants were established in the 1800s. We walked along the river on pedestrian paths shaded by banyan and camphor trees and lined with neoclassical mansions and government buildings marked with brass plaques.

In one of these heritage buildings, we stumbled onto a small, curated collection of clothing, crafts, and jewelry. Among the booths selling key chains, ceramics, and handbags, there was a wall display of handmade contemporary postcards with translucent slide-film photographs of local scenes embedded in the card stock.

The slide-film postcards jogged loose a memory: When I was young, my father had a light box in his studio, on which he examined slides of art and reference photographs with a loupe. He'd print his chosen images large, to pin up next to his canvas for inspiration as he worked. Later, when I was in high school and deciding whether to pursue the visual arts, I had slides made of my own art portfolio.

In the shop, I held the postcards up to the light: koi-shaped lanterns at night; a spire-filled downtown skyline with Canton Tower as the centerpiece; a view of the Pearl River from Shamian, the water a striking slash of green.

There's truth to a vision that blurs past and present, to the notion of palimpsest, of the old peeking out from the new. Guangzhou was constantly revealing itself to us that way. So was my father. Though I used to get frustrated at him for not visiting us more in California—*Didn't he miss us? Didn't he want to know the boys?*—I now understood that he showed us love in his own way.

Yuyin Shanfang is one of the four most famous gardens in Guangdong Province.

The Afar Guide to Guangzhou

Due to its location at the head of the Pearl River, Guangzhou has long been an important commercial and trading center. Once a key port on the Maritime Silk Road, today it's one of China's largest cities, renowned for its arts, crafts, and cuisine.
—Katherine LaGrave

WHERE TO STAY

Renovated in 2021, the **Ritz-Carlton** is steps from the Pearl River, and all 351 rooms and suites—complete with marble bathrooms, feather beds, and walk-in closets—feature views of either the water or the bustling cityscape below. The spa, including a fitness center and heated outdoor pool, covers an entire 43,000-square-foot hotel floor.

Conveniently located in the center of downtown, the **Mandarin Oriental** debuted in 2013 with 263 rooms that are some of the largest in the city. Jiang by Chef Fei is one of three restaurants with two Michelin stars in Guangzhou; for a more casual treat, sit for a while in the lobby's very Instagrammable cake shop, where intricate confections, available with coffee and tea, are displayed in elegant glass cases.

WHERE TO EAT

Nanxin Milk Desserts Expert has been in business since 1934 and, despite its name, serves solid savory fare such as wonton soup and noodles with brisket. Standouts here, though, are the milks and soups; the restaurant's panna cotta–like double skin milk (a concoction with milk, egg whites, and sugar) is silky, smooth, and one of the best in town.

In 2024, **Yong** became the first Guangzhou restaurant to receive a Michelin Green Star for its commitment to sustainability. Housed in a century-old heritage building, it offers a fixed-price Szechuan menu sourced largely from local ingredients; the housemade pickles are a delight.

Go hungry—and ideally, with a group—to wander **Xihua Road**, which is packed with casual eateries serving everything from hand-ground black sesame soup to steamed rice-noodle rolls.

WHAT TO DO

Opened in May 2024 on the banks of the Pearl River, the swan-shaped **Bai'etan Greater Bay Area Art Center** comprises three impressive museums: the Guangdong Museum of Art, the Guangdong Literature Museum, and the Guangdong Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum.

Tiny **Shamian** (which translates to "sandy surface") is a tranquil, walkable island with tree-lined avenues and European-style 19th-century buildings, a "look" largely owing to its past: In 1859 it was divided into two concessions, given to France and the United Kingdom until 1943.

Chen Clan Ancestral Hall was completed in 1894 and served as a temple, school, and gathering place for Chen family members from 72 counties in Guangdong Province. Now home to the Guangdong Museum of Folk Arts, the complex is a premier example of traditional Lingnan architecture, with brick, stone, and wood carvings.

GET THERE (AND GET AROUND)

Under China's visa-free travel program, citizens from 54 countries—the United States among them—can stay up to 10 days in cities including Guangzhou without a visa, provided they have a valid passport and return ticket.

With 16 lines and 302 stations, the **Guangzhou Metro** operates from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. Extensive and fast, it has elevators and escalators at all stations and announcements in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. **DiDi**, a ride-sharing app similar to Uber, is available in English.

Asking what foods we wanted most to eat, cuing up favorite films for us to watch, bringing out old paintings, showing Teddy the correct way to punch the heavy bag in the home gym.

Over the next few days, my father absorbed Teddy into his comfort zone, touring him around the art studio. He showed Teddy a photo he'd taken of his baby face on our last visit to Guangzhou, which served as the background photo on his computer monitor. "Teddy," he said, "I look at you every day."

ON OUR SECOND-TO-LAST MORNING,

Teddy and I hopped in an electric taxi to visit one more spot. My father wasn't feeling well, so he stayed behind, but I wanted Teddy to see Yuyin Shanfang. Among his grandfather's favorite places in Guangzhou, and mine, it's one of Guangdong Province's four classical gardens from the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). When my father first moved to this part of China, he found inspiration for some of his paintings here. Covering less than half an acre, it's famous for its exquisite Lingnan architecture, which includes open-air pavilions, courtyards and narrow alleys, colorful stained glass, decorative relief carvings and sculptures, meticulously tended gardens, and koi ponds.

The moment we stepped through the stone doorway and saw the bougainvillea bonsai, Teddy was smitten. From a waterside pavilion that featured a different view from each of its eight sides, he fed the resident koi, a flashing stream of orange, white, and black that then followed him as he crossed from bridge to bridge, sometimes dispersing, other times coming back to see if he had any remaining treats. In one courtyard shop, a young woman with fast fingers strung jade bracelets for us with our Chinese names. Teddy shyly thanked her in Mandarin, and I felt a swell of joy as he examined the delicate gold characters painted on the beads.

As we were on our way out, a camera crew brought a group of women dressed in classical period costume into one of the water pavilions. We paused to watch. They were shooting a television commercial for Chinese liquor. After Teddy attempted a photobomb, we went home, showed my dad the videos, and shared the news about Yuyin's brand-new dessert café—where he could now get his ginger buffalo-milk custard and black sesame soup just 10 minutes from home.

This page: In Chinese culture, koi symbolize good luck.

Opposite page: The Liwan District is a historic part of Guangzhou, which was the first Chinese city to be visited by European traders in the 3rd century.

What else will be different when we return to Guangzhou? My father is getting older, and so am I. I'd like to think that the next time I visit, I'll be able to add yet another self—a gentler, more accepting one—to the many-layered person I am, and to imagine the same possibility for my dad. After all, reality is messy, complicated, not neatly contained within the confines of an airplane window.

A few weeks after we returned home, my father sent me a text: "Been thinking of you. Teddy reminds me of you when you were a kid. Love you guys."

I think then about the gardens. How we watched the koi swim apart to the far corners of the pond, before coming back together again. Ⓐ

Contributing writer Bonnie Tsui jumped into Swiss rivers for her feature in Afar's Fall 2024 issue. An Rong Xu photographed Taipei for the Spring 2023 issue of Afar.

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WASHINGTON

Great American Cities

Politics may be the foundation of the nation's capital, but culture is what makes the district shine. Meet three local luminaries ensuring the city remains a creatively invigorating place for residents and visitors alike.

by Amy Alipio

Photographs by Scott Suchman

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IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE to learn that the largest Shakespeare collection in the world resides not in London or Stratford-upon-Avon but in Washington, D.C., at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Or that the only Leonardo da Vinci painting in the Americas can be found at the National Gallery of Art. Or that go-go music was invented in D.C., born out of the city's vibrant funk scene.

As all eyes turn to Washington once again at the start of a new administration, these and other superlatives prove that it isn't just a political capital but a cultural one as well. Travelers head to the National Mall to find marble memorials, Smithsonian museums (housing everything from spacecraft to Dorothy's ruby slippers), and global gatherings (like WorldPride 2025, taking place May 17 to June 8). But Washingtonians know that the area's cultural dynamism goes beyond the Mall—and even beyond the District of Columbia's 68 square miles, into suburban Virginia and Maryland. The metropolitan region is one of the most diverse in the nation, including large Salvadoran, Ethiopian, and Vietnamese communities.

To help travelers grasp the district's infinite variety, we spoke to three creative leaders: Lonnie Bunch, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; Michael Rafidi, the chef of the Michelin-starred Albi restaurant; and Sunny Sumter, president and CEO of the 20-year-old DC Jazz Festival. Their stories exemplify the true spirit of D.C.

Clockwise from above: Decatur House on Lafayette Square; the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum; Lonnie Bunch at the museum, where he began his career. *Pages 86–87:* Visitors relax on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

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LONNIE BUNCH

Secretary, Smithsonian Institution

When Lonnie Bunch came to D.C. from New Jersey in the 1970s to attend Howard University as an undergraduate, his first reaction was, "This is a strange city." Soon, though, he fell in love with the place, transferring to American University and earning degrees in American and African American history. He has held several positions at the Smithsonian, beginning with his first professional job as an education specialist at the National Air and Space Museum. Bunch was the founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016, and now, as the 14th—and first Black—secretary of the Smithsonian, he oversees the institution's myriad museums and research centers.

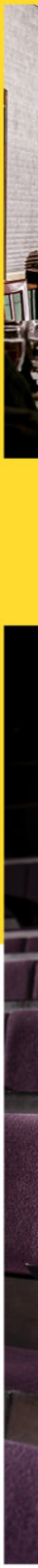
"IN SOME WAYS, the Smithsonian has shaped everything about me. I met my wife here. My kids went to preschool at the Smithsonian. When I was at Howard, I'd be studying a lot, and then I'd try to find escapes. I remember walking down Georgia Avenue to Seventh Street and finding the National Portrait Gallery—seeing the portraits of Frederick Douglass and the presidents. [The museum offered] a way to see history through a different light.

The Smithsonian has always been that place for me, where it's not just an escape, but a reservoir that I can dip into for knowledge, for hope, to have questions answered, or to find myself posing different questions. Yes, you're coming to the Smithsonian to see cool stuff, but you're also coming to understand who you are, who you once were, and who you can become.

There are few things as powerful as seeing the Mall or the Capitol at night. But I also think that it's [lesser-known places]: It's Decatur House on Lafayette Square in front of the White House, where you get an understanding that this was a neighborhood, that enslaved people lived there. One of the great things for me about D.C. is walking through Georgetown, going up the street and turning left, tripping over cobblestones and suddenly seeing houses that are hundreds of years old. I think one of the great joys of Washington is to find neighborhoods that allow you to see what D.C. was once like and what it still is.

I especially love the Phillips Collection and other hidden treasures that are often overwhelmed by the Smithsonian and by the monumental core of D.C. I love walking around Sheridan Circle and thinking about Civil War general Phil Sheridan and all those people who have statues in D.C. or who have circles named after them.

If you had to go to one place to try to effect change, it's Washington, D.C. But the challenge is to have people understand that D.C. is a real home, not just the site of government."



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

MICHAEL RAFIDI

Chef and owner, Albi

Growing up in Gaithersburg, Maryland, about 25 miles northwest of D.C., Michael Rafidi would hang out with his grandfather, a chef, at home in the kitchen. “That shaped me not just as a cook but as an individual,” he says. In 2024, Rafidi, a Palestinian American, was named Outstanding Chef by the James Beard Foundation for his Levantine-inspired restaurant Albi, located in the riverfront Yards neighborhood. His growing culinary reach now also includes the café Yellow and the bistro and cocktail bar La’ Shukran.

“OPENING UP ALBI IN 2020 was the first time I really dove into my Palestinian heritage and cooking it professionally. For 15 years before that, I was cooking modern American, French, European food. I was living on a different coast from my family. Then people who had inspired me, including my grandparents, were getting older and passing away, and I wasn’t eating that nostalgic food anymore. And I asked, *Why am I cooking food that has no connection to me?* I felt like I was losing passion in cooking a little bit, and I wanted to cook food that was special to me.

We’re cooking Arabic, Palestinian, and Levantine food, but really everything we use is very midatlantic. Every vegetable, all the protein—the lamb, the chicken—is local. We don’t have tomatoes on the menu unless it’s tomato season in this area. That’s really different if you’re in the Middle East, where it’s a very different climate and you can get tomatoes and cucumbers all year round.

I grew up eating crab in Maryland, so every crab season we go bananas and have it all over the menu. There’s not really any crab in Palestinian food. We do *kousa mahshi*, stuffed squash—it’s a staple dish in the Levant—but we do it with Maryland crab in season. We do Maryland crab hummus. We do crab tabbouleh. We do a version of the North African *chermoula* paste and add Old Bay spice. We call it Chermoula Bay.

We don’t get into politics and what’s going on in the world when people come to the restaurant. I just want to educate the diners on how great Palestinian cuisine is and show them something new, a different interpretation of my heritage.”

This page, from above: Mr. Henry's, in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, regularly hosts jazz combos; Sunny Sumter at Arena Stage. *Opposite page, from far left:* Pear and apple *fattoush* salad at Albi; Michael Rafidi plates a dish at his bistro La' Shukran.

STRIKING THE RIGHT NOTE

SUNNY SUMTER

President and CEO, DC Jazz Festival

Native Washingtonian Sunny Sumter oversees the DC Jazz Festival, a nonprofit that organizes jazz performances and programs throughout the year, including DC JazzFest, a five-day, mostly free annual celebration of "our nation's gift to the world," which takes place over Labor Day weekend. She was recruited in 2008 by festival founder Charles Fishman, Dizzy Gillespie's former manager, who had noted her arts management skills at the Aspen Institute, the Smithsonian, and the Rhythm and Blues Foundation. A graduate of Howard University, the silky-voiced Sumter juggled her singing career and arts administration roles for years. She no longer appears regularly on D.C. stages, but, she says, "I am wearing the CEO hat and am loving every minute of this side of the work."

"I'M GONNA BRAG A LITTLE BIT. I think that because we have 25 colleges and universities in our region, a lot of jazz artists come to study here. We've created this hub of incredible young artists who play together, learn together, and grow together. They go off to perform with some of the most important artists in the world, but when they come home, they play. And sometimes you just stumble into a restaurant and there they are with their guitar or with their horn. It's really wonderful. Once I went to a restaurant with my family, and I'm sitting there, and there's Keter Betts playing. Keter Betts! He was the bass player for Ella Fitzgerald. I couldn't believe it. That's the uniqueness of this place.

With the DC Jazz Festival, we have a special opportunity to bring jazz to all corners of the city. People from around the world come to D.C. and go to pockets of the city that maybe they never visited before, like Brookland or Anacostia. They get to see these wonderful neighborhoods and hear great jazz.

In the early 2000s, I could go up and down U Street on Friday and Saturday nights, and there'd be jazz happening. It was really fantastic. Now, instead of being centered in one district, jazz is more decentralized and thriving all across the city with new venues, fresh talent, and innovative programming. D.C.'s jazz renaissance is about redefining the future of jazz."

UNION MARKET

hite
EXTRA COLD
Function
Lock
ON/OFF

Clockwise from top left: Union Market is home to more than 50 independent vendors; the restaurant Anju serves Korean pub food; the Renwick Gallery focuses on contemporary American craft; travelers can rent kayaks on the Potomac River; Georgetown is known for its colorful and historic row houses that date to the 18th and 19th centuries.

DIVE DEEPER INTO D.C. IN THE LATEST EPISODE OF

Unpacked

THE AFAR GUIDE TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

It's not just about politics in this city of 702,000 (which is part of a greater metropolitan population of 6.3 million). Whether you're a theater geek, foodie, sports fan, music lover, outdoor adventurer, or history buff, Washington surprises with its wealth of possibilities.

WHERE TO EAT

Thanks to D.C.'s globally diverse populace, it's easy to find an authentic spot for pretty much any type of food, from Georgian to Ghanaian. And while there are plenty of expense account–required places, quick and affordable meals abound, too. Fast-casual Taco Bamba in City Ridge puts a bold spin on the classic taco, filling it with pairings such as sweet potato fries and pimiento cheese. For a Korean feast, head to Anju in Dupont Circle for *maeun dwaeji galbijjim*, spicy braised pork ribs. Sample a wide variety of flavors in Union Market: Get burgers at Lucky Buns, Japanese soups at Ramen by Uzu, and Greek *kourabiedes* (cookies dusted with powdered sugar) at Mastiha Taverna.

After a day spent at the museums, walk to Penn Quarter, where family-friendly Matchbox serves wood-fired pizzas. Nearby, the elegant Indian spot Rasika offers spicy kebabs and luscious fish curries.

Washingtonians love a good happy hour. For beers and Nationals games there's Pitchers and the adjoining A League of Her Own, both LGBTQ sports bars in Adams Morgan. At Amazonia, a Peruvian cocktail bar in Shaw, sip pisco sours. And in the Logan Circle/14th Street neighborhood try a Lebanese sauvignon blanc at Compass Rose.

WHERE TO SHOP

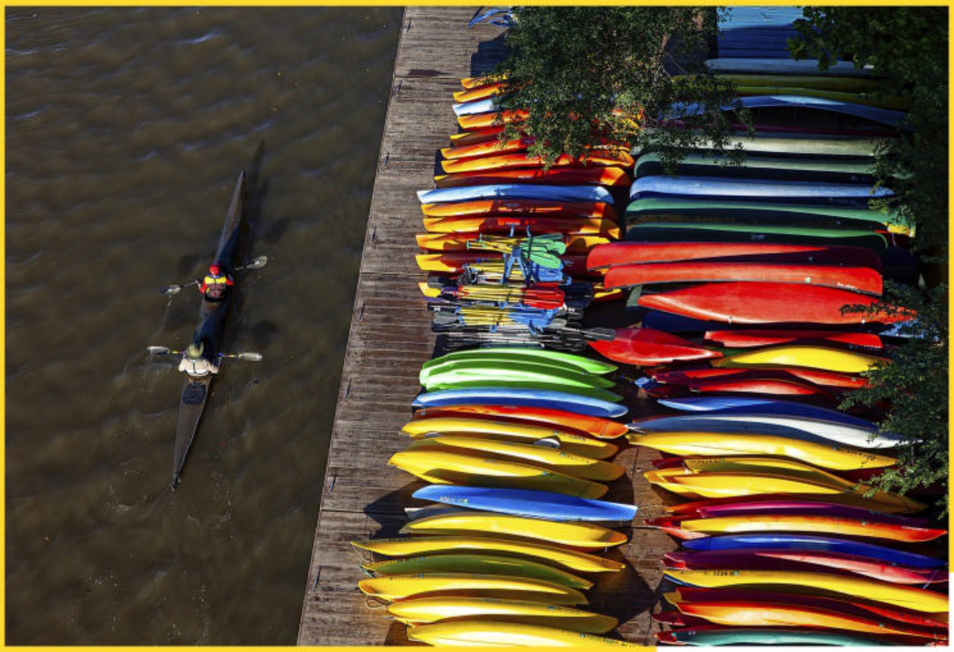
The Union Market District houses outposts of homegrown boutiques such as Shop Made in DC (whimsical souvenirs by local makers), Salt & Sundry (artisan home goods), and Libby and My (decor, vintage clothing, and disco balls). D.C. is one of the most well-read cities in the country, so it's no surprise its many indie bookstores, including Politics and Prose and Sankofa, double as lively cafés.

WHAT TO DO

With all its museums and impressive interiors, D.C.'s outdoor attrations are sometimes overlooked. The National Zoo is the only place in the United States where you can visit giant pandas for free; newcomers Bao Li and Qing Bao made their official public debut in January and have already become celebrities. You can get to the zoo by taking the Metro, biking (try Capital Bikeshare), or driving along woodsy Rock Creek Parkway. To see firsthand how conservation efforts are reviving D.C.'s waterfront, rent a kayak to explore the Anacostia or Potomac rivers.

Combine art and nature at the private Glenstone Museum, located right outside the city in Potomac, Maryland. (Entry is free, but reservations are required.) A stroll through its pavilions and nearly 300 acres reveals thought-provoking contemporary installations and remarkable works of land art.

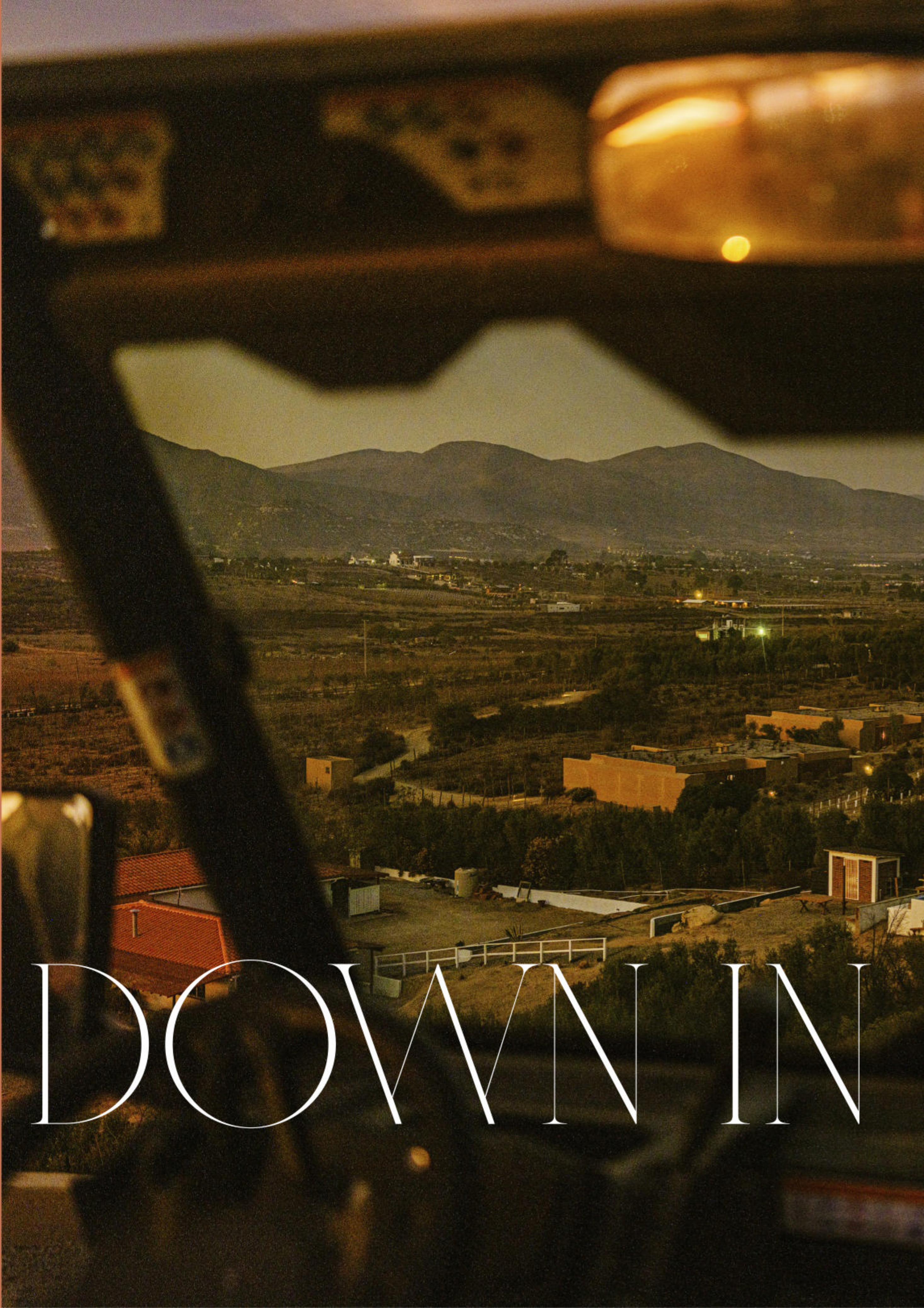
Of course, visiting at least one Smithsonian museum is nonnegotiable. Escape the crowds and explore the Renwick Gallery, which displays contemporary American crafts and decorative art in a National Historic Landmark near the White House.



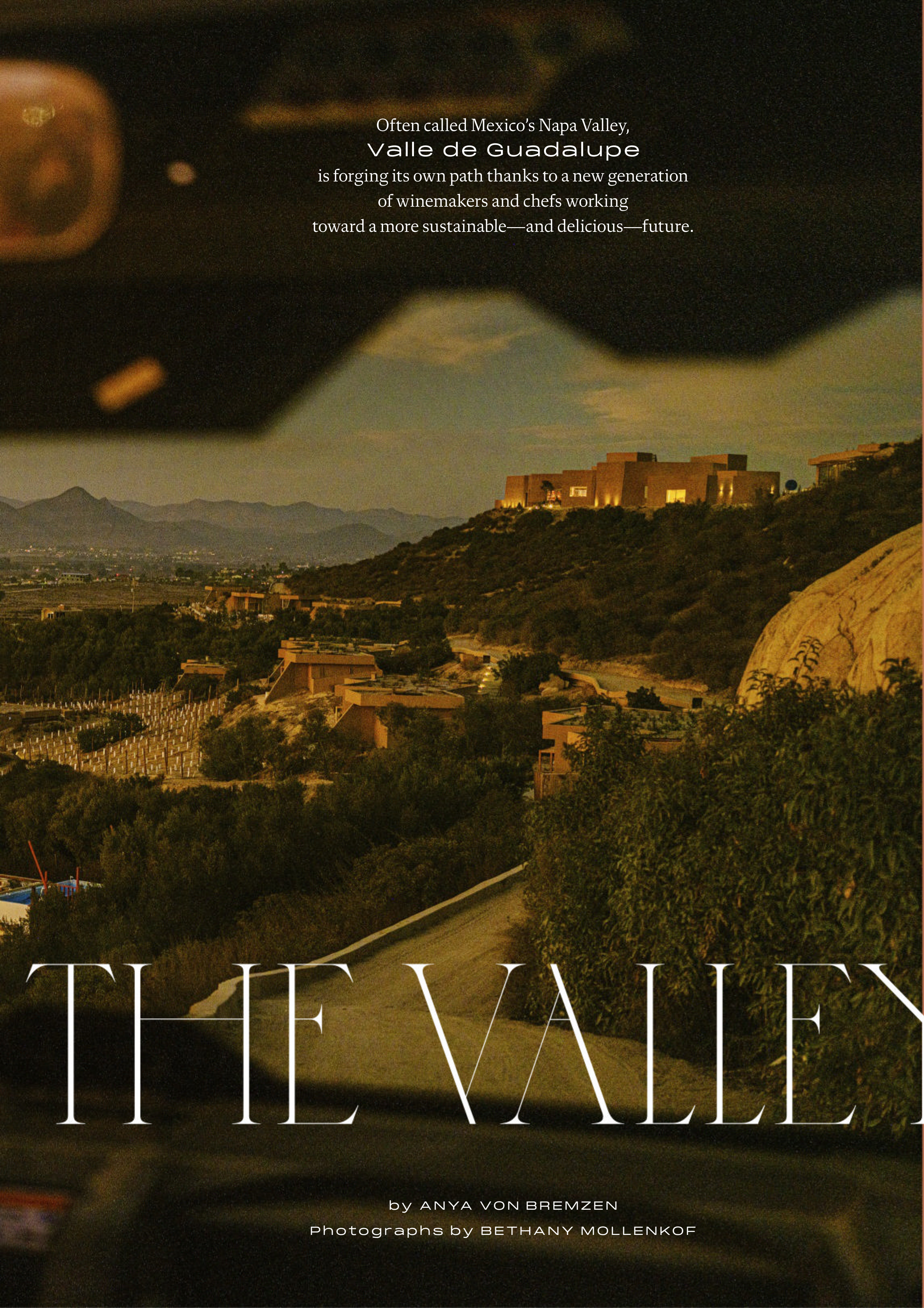
WHERE TO STAY

Salamander DC—the first D.C. property from BET cofounder Sheila Johnson's Salamander Resorts—debuted a large-scale renovation this past fall, including a lavishly expanded spa and a new Afro-Caribbean restaurant, Dōgon, from star chef Kwame Onwuachi. Located on its eponymous roundabout, the 327-room Dupont Circle hotel attracts visiting diplomats as well as locals coming in for a glass of champagne. The socially conscious Eaton DC has a community radio station and three floors of communal working spaces where travelers can connect with creative, like-minded locals. (All three properties appear on Afar's Hotels We Love list.)

Amy Alipio wrote about photographer Pia Riverola for Afar's Winter 2025 issue. Scott Suchman photographed D.C. for Afar's May/June 2020 issue.



DOWN IN



Often called Mexico's Napa Valley, **Valle de Guadalupe** is forging its own path thanks to a new generation of winemakers and chefs working toward a more sustainable—and delicious—future.

THE VALLEY

by ANYA VON BREMZEN

Photographs by BETHANY MOLLENKOF

USA
San Diego
Pacific Ocean
Tijuana
Mexico
Valle de Guadalupe
Ensenada

“WE HAVE MEXICO’S BEST wine and restaurants—and its worst roads!” declares Fernando Pérez Castro, the 47-year-old proprietor of Lomita and Finca La Carrodilla wineries in Valle de Guadalupe, as we jostle along a maze of dirt lanes, past fields and boulder-strewn hillslopes.

“And GPS can be funny *aquí*,” adds Sheyla Alvarado, chef at Lunario, Lomita’s acclaimed restaurant. Coming to pick up me and Barry, my partner, at our hotel from only a few miles away, they got lost. “Happens even to people who live here!” she laughs.

Situated in the northern Baja California Peninsula just under two hours from San Diego, Valle de Guadalupe is Mexico’s premier viticultural region, producing more than 70 percent of the wine in a country still mostly associated with beer and tequila. As viticultural regions go, Baja isn’t exactly brand new. But recently I found myself captivated by the expressive—and sometimes outright funky—bottlings from its new generation of winemakers that I tasted at Mexico City’s restaurants and natural wine bars. U.S. chefs and sommeliers have been taking notice too; these days one can find Valle wines at Napa Valley stalwart The French Laundry. Equally intriguing were reports from my Mexican food journalist friends about the culinary scene effervescing just south of the border.

Eager to meet the forward-thinking vintners and chefs transforming this former ranch country into one of Mexico’s most compelling destinations for eating and drinking, Barry and I had landed in San Diego that afternoon, to be chauffeured south on the Baja coast highway, with glimpses of cliffs and Pacific surf in the early October fog. Turning inland, up through chaparral-stubbled granite hills into the Valle proper, we found the afternoon suddenly shining—and freakishly hot.

It was close to 100°F when we arrived at the Banyan Tree Veya Valle de Guadalupe, a 16-acre wellness retreat that opened in 2024, the first hotel in the Valle from an international hospitality group. After a dip in the plunge pool overlooking rows of young vines at our stylish villa—there are 30 on the property—we’d hit the ruts and dust with Pérez Castro and Alvarado. Our plan? To dine at Lunario following a tour of Finca La Carrodilla, the organic winery and farm that supplies its ingredients.

“Over 500 years ago the conquistador Hernán Cortés ordered vines planted in Mexico for the Christian sacrament,” Pérez Castro says, as we stroll in the soft early twilight among his plots, where stray post-harvest clusters of purple grenache grapes still peek. Viticulture in Baja goes back to the early 18th century, when Catholic missionaries began planting vines to produce altar wines. The Valle’s first commercial winery, Bodegas de Santo Tomás, opened in 1888 on the site of a former Dominican mission.

Pérez Castro’s own family story is typical of the region. In 2004 his parents moved from Mexicali to the Valle, where they built a vacation home. They later started Lomita—about five miles away from Finca La Carrodilla—as something of a retirement project, and officially launched it in 2009. By then, the Valle had around 15 wineries, most of them small hobby ventures turning out no more than 5,000 cases, produced by aspiring winemakers lured here by sunny weather, affordable land, and above all, Pérez Castro says, “a desire to be part of Mexico’s sexy new wine movement.” At the time, he recalls, the area had perhaps only three or four enologists.

“And now?” He gestures at his sleek modernist facilities. “The Valle has over 150 wineries, and the scene has gone sophisticated with fancy hotels and restaurants recognized by Michelin and 50 Best Latin America.”

But the Valle’s fragile ecosystem is under threat. “Our resources, especially water, are limited,” says Pérez Castro, who practices organic and agroecological farming, harvesting and sorting his grapes by hand and using a free-flow production method to move grapes around without the use of machines. “Being [in] a semi-arid region, we can’t demand from nature more than it can provide.

“Sustainability,” he concludes, “is our only way forward.” We’ll hear this mantra often during our visit.

IT’S WORTH TRAVELING all the way to the Valle just for a meal at Lunario, the minimalist stone-and-wood restaurant founded by Pérez Castro in 2019 on Lomita winery’s grounds and awarded a Michelin Green sustainability star in 2024. During our dinner that evening, each new dish brings a flash of excitement. “We’re so lucky to grow most of our food,” says chef Alvarado, presenting a plate of lightly smoked Ensenada oysters in an electric-green mole that’s highlighted with a Japanese *yuzu kosho* made with fermented shishito peppers—a lovely pairing with Lomita’s bright chardonnay.

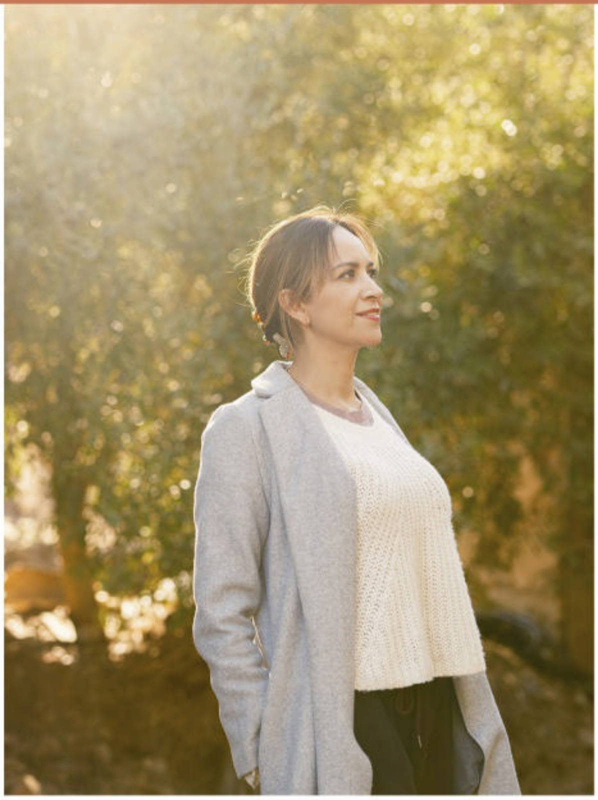
The 34-year-old Alvarado, who hails from the Mexican state of Sonora, honed her craft at such places as Cosme in New York City and Mirazur in Menton, France. “But I’m happiest here,” she says as we savor her striking black-on-black composition of blue corn and nopal tamale with a dusky sauce of burnt guajillo chilies and onion. A luminous piece of striped bass follows, slicked with a coffee emulsion and accompanied by an addictive sweet corn–chili atole.

“We are a young region,” muses Pérez Castro over matcha-like ice cream Alvarado makes from green marigold stems, “far away from traditions and rules in the rest of our country, where everything is recorded and codified.” The chef nods: “We get to create our own concept of Baja cuisine, put whatever we want in our tamales and moles.”

It’s this spirit of imagination unconstrained by tradition, I’ll realize, that makes the Valle such an exciting destination for those seeking discovery—rutted roads notwithstanding.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The Pictograma Winery at Banyan Tree Veya; an octopus and *suadero* taco at Lunario; Lunario’s sister farm, Finca La Carrodilla; chef Sheyla Alvarado of Lunario, which was awarded a Michelin Green Star in 2024.

Pages 94–95: In addition to its winemaking focus, Banyan Tree Veya offers wellness therapies.



Clockwise from top left: Winemaker Verónica Santiago of Mina Penélope; chef Sheyla Alvarado of Lunario; pastry chef Maribel Aldaco Silva of Fauna; winemaker Silvana Pijoan of Vinos Pijoan; winemaker Lulú Martínez Ojeda of Bruma; Karina Campos, owner of Wine Eat and Travel

GIVEN THOSE ROADS, a visitor would be wise to hire a local guide. The next morning, we meet Karina Campos, the owner of boutique agency Wine Eat and Travel. A Guadalajara native, Campos was drawn to the Valle in 2020 by its landscapes and sense of possibility and community.

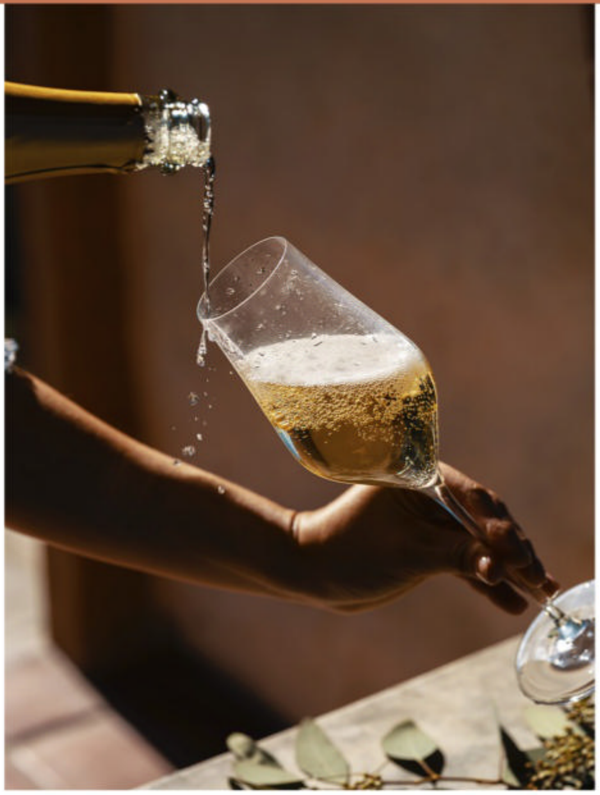
I was delighted to learn that one of her tours showcases women winemakers. Some of the most interesting Baja wines I'd tasted in Mexico City were produced by female vintners, such as Lulú Martínez Ojeda of Bruma. "Women are becoming quite a force in the Valle," says Campos, as she drives us to the area of San Antonio de Las Minas to meet Verónica Santiago, admired on both sides of the border for her elegant bottlings.

A graceful former dancer, Santiago greets us on the cypress-fringed grounds of her winery, Mina Penélope. "With just 2,000 cases a year, we are tiny but mighty!" she says. Like Pérez Castro's family, hers started their viticulture after buying some acres to enjoy retirement. While her mother—who ran a tortilla business in Ensenada—planted vines back in 2007, Santiago studied enology in Australia and fell for biodynamic farming; at Mina Penélope, water canals capture and redirect water, and Santiago rebuilds and replenishes soil through composting and cover crops. "All our production is manual," she notes, stepping gingerly as she leads us around her tiny facility past an old-fashioned basket press. Santiago's husband, Nathan Malagón, runs the vineyard with a team while Santiago focuses on the laboratory and wine production. The pressing has just ended, and the air is pungent with grape must.

Santiago improvises a tasting table among the tanks and hoses. She has us sample an "amber" sauvignon blanc with seductive apricot notes, fermented in stainless steel for 10 days with skin contact. Next we twirl and sip an aromatic, unorthodox *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine she produces from Italian aglianico grapes instead of the predictable champagne varietals. "The Valle doesn't really have a signature grape," Santiago says. "We're still experimenting, evolving. But my dream is for us to be known as pioneers of sustainability. We are willing to sacrifice production for longevity and what we believe is the greater good of our environment."

ANOTHER STAR FEMALE VINTNER joins us later for lunch at Villa Torél, a farm-to-table restaurant opened by chef Alfredo Villanueva in 2019 on the idyllic grounds of the Santo Tomás winery. As we settle around a panoramic garden table flanked by wild lavender bushes, 32-year-old Silvana Pijoan appears like a badass poster child of the next generation: bright

"For the longest time winemakers here were into the same Napa-style clichés—crisp whites, big, bold reds. But now younger people are having fun and doing some pretty wild things."



This page, from top: Wine Eat and Travel offers a women-owned winery tour; Villa Torél has a Bib Gourmand mention in the Michelin guide for its contemporary take on Mexican cuisine.

Opposite page: Valle de Guadalupe has a Mediterranean-like microclimate.

red T-shirt over bicycle shorts, tattooed arms cradling bottles.

"Well, many first-generation winemakers had daughters!" she laughs, when I ask why the Valle has so much female talent. "There's simply a lot of us," she adds, dunking crusty bread into a tureen of mussels in a puckery escabeche sauce.

The youngest of three daughters, Pijoan, like Santiago, studied dance, but eventually ended up training as a sommelier and then working for Vinos Pijoan, the winery her father founded in 2012—"as a cure" she chuckles, "for dad's midlife crisis."

The Valle is often called Mexico's Napa Valley. But it's really an anti-Napa of sorts—rugged, often anarchic, zero expensive boutiques. "Yet for the longest time winemakers here were into the same Napa-style clichés," Pijoan tells us. "Crisp whites, big, bold reds, *blah, blah*." She pauses to tuck some crab salad into a pita. "But now younger people are having fun and doing some pretty wild things," she says.

Pijoan herself is making outstanding natural wines alongside her dad's more conservative bottlings. When she uncorks a white irreverently named La Poubelle, French slang for "trash can," I'm smitten. The lightly oxidated small-parcel sauvignon blanc, allowed some skin contact before being fermented in oak, pairs splendidly with our rosy slabs of raw bluefin tuna and rhubarb kimchi served with blue corn tostadas. Ditto the massive sweet roasted carrots with duck jus and citrus cream from Villanueva's whimsical menu.

As we taste a sweet-herbaceous vermouth that Pijoan (along with her sister and father) created in part to solve a waste issue—utilizing cloudy grape juice left over from winemaking—the conversation turns to the climate-changed future. Two recent years of rains have given some relief after harrowing periods of drought. "But we need to keep looking for grapes that adapt," Pijoan says.

Like other winemakers here, she'd been experimenting with planting misión, a vigorous, drought-resistant varietal that happens to be the very first grapevine introduced to the Americas by Spanish missionaries. Pijoan used it in her 2023 Vino Pelón, which she opens for us, a fruity-smoky red made from a field blend that also includes syrah, grenache, and muscatel. "It's a wine of many layers and characters that really represents what we do in the Valle," Pijoan says. And it's the kind of French-Spanish varietal blend that could exist only in the Valle, where there are no appellation rules or other regulatory red tape to interfere with the winemakers' playful experiments.

This page: Bruma's Lulú Martínez Ojeda specializes in small-batch wines designed to complement the local cuisine.

Opposite page: Banyan Tree Veya spans 16 acres.

FOR

OUR LAST FEW days in the Valle, we move to Casa 8, an eight-room ecoretreat opened in 2015 by Bruma Wine Resort group. The hotel's naturalistic design of rough stone and repurposed wood is by the Baja-based architect Alejandro D'Acosta (brother of local winemaker Hugo D'Acosta), much esteemed in Mexico for his poetic use of recycled materials. One of the Valle's most reproduced images is of the D'Acosta-designed Bruma winery building.

We head there for a tasting our last afternoon in the Valle—slightly spooked by signs warning of rattlesnakes but excited to meet its enologist, Lulú Martínez Ojeda, whose wines I've admired in Mexico City. "The space is very Tim Burton, no?" says Martínez Ojeda, leading us into the theatrical circular underground barrel room that looks vaguely ritualistic. The stupendous tree trunk jutting up through the middle? "It's from a dead 300-year-old oak Alejandro brought back to life this way," she says. "Symbolic of the Valle, perhaps?"

Upstairs, outside of the tasting room windows, the oak tree's twisted sculptural branches double dramatically in a reflecting pool. We try Martínez Ojeda's Bruma Ocho sangiovese rosé that's on the list at The French Laundry, and she reminisces about growing up among her great-grandmother's vineyards near Ensenada. She returned to the Valle in 2014 after a decade of winemaking at Château Brane-Cantenac, a blue-chip estate in Bordeaux. "Bordeaux is so important, so magical, but also static somehow," she says. "People would constantly ask if I was a daughter of a winemaker—or sister or lover." She opens her Bruma Bastardo next, a very anti-Bordeaux "bastard" blend of mourvèdre and montepulciano. "And here?" she says. "We have no hereditary weight, no burdens of history. Girls are happy to get super involved—and nobody stops them. Even in a macho country like Mexico.

"So what is our identity here?" Martínez Ojeda muses, corkscrew in hand. "Maybe it's the liberty from *having* an identity? Freedom to experiment and innovate, to move forward quickly and happily."

WHERE TO EAT, DRINK, AND STAY IN VALLE DE GUADALUPE

Valle de Guadalupe lies less than two hours south of San Diego by car. The best times to visit are spring and fall, and because the roads here are famously rustic and maze-like, it's best to hire a local travel advisor such as Wine Eat and Travel or work with a member of Afar's Travel Advisory Council (*afar.com/about/travel-advisory-council*) to help plan your trip.

WHERE *to* STAY

The 30 modernist villas of **Banyan Tree Veya Valle de Guadalupe**—each with a plunge pool and a fireplace—were designed by celebrated Mexican architect Michel Rojkind to harmonize with the property's 16 acres of hillside landscape. Opened in 2024, this wellness resort from the Singapore-based luxury hospitality group draws on Asian traditions to tune up guests' serenity and offers treatments such as Qi Body Flow at its expansive holistic spa. The on-site winery, Pictograma, specializes in grenache grapes and is housed in a striking multivault structure inspired by the Valle's Spanish mission past.

A stay at **Bruma Wine Resort** offers three sustainability-minded, stylish accommodation options spread over its acreage. Casa 8 consists of eight guest rooms set in a charming desert garden; Casa Montaña comprises two sleek four-room villas overlooking a pond and vineyard; and in Ático's industrial-chic 17 rooms above the Mercado Bruma restaurant and retail complex, you wake to the aromas of coffee and freshly baked *conchas* (sweet breads) made by Maribel Aldaco Silva, regarded as Latin America's best pastry chef.

High along a boulder-studded slope, the 10 **Mira Earth Studios**, opened as a hotel in 2023, are like luxury screening rooms for sweeping Valle panoramas of vine plots and ranging hills. Their platform-decks' sunken hot tubs are perfect for stargazing. The ecochic rooms have rammed-earth walls, green roofs, and earth-tone decor. The many thoughtful amenities include s'more kits for the firepit out on the deck, and fragrant toiletries from Baja Botánica.

WHERE *to* EAT

In 2017 powerhouse Baja chef Javier Plascencia opened **Animalón**, which recently earned a Michelin star. Book a table (open seasonally from April to November) under a massive oak tree for the chef's inventive six- or nine-course tasting menus featuring dishes such as roast duck with a complex guava mole. Wine pairings by sommelier Lauren Plascencia are a must.

Another recent Michelin star went to **Conchas de Piedra** from U.S. chef Drew Deckman, a Valle pioneer behind the restaurant Deckman's En El Mogor. At this shellfish-forward spot on the grounds of Casa de Piedra winery, responsibly sourced Baja bivalves come dressed with creative flourishes and are matched with sparkling wines from vintner Hugo D'Acosta.

Currently number 17 of the World's 50 Best Restaurants in Latin America, **Fauna** serves chef David Castro Hussong's reimagined campfire cuisine around large communal tables, with many ingredients grown right outside. Castro Hussong's more casual **Bruma Wine Garden**, set indoors amid live olive trees with views of the vineyards, is famous for creatively topped sourdough pizzas and a breakfast sea urchin croissant.

Also on the 50 Best in Latin America list is the charming **Villa Torél** on the grounds of Santo Tomás winery. Chef Alfredo Villanueva conjures eclectic dishes with local seafood and produce presented on grandmotherly china. Mondays there's a popular event called Liernes, featuring inexpensive set menus and a DJ.

Greenhouse-like **Lunario** on the Lomita winery property has a Michelin Green Star for chef Sheyla Alvarado, whose four- and six-course tasting menus romance Baja seafood and produce from the restaurant's farm. The wine list features bottlings from Lomita and its sister winery, Finca La Carrodilla.

WINERIES *to* VISIT

Founded in 2005 by British expats Eileen and Phil Gregory, **Vena Cava** draws visitors both for its wines and for its bravura sustainable architecture by Alejandro D'Acosta; behold the ceiling of upturned reclaimed fishing boats. Food truck Troika serves everything from Mayan pumpkin dip to banoffee pie, thick with bananas and caramel.

Bruma is another architectural tour de force by D'Acosta, with an underground barrel room tent-poled by an oak tree trunk. The scene is set for Bordeaux-trained enologist Lulú Martínez Ojeda's expressive wines. Reserve a tour: *vinicolareservaciones@bruma.mx*.

Come to **Mina Penélope**'s beautiful property for winemaker Verónica Santiago's vivacious natural wines and her amber sauvignon blanc. Stay for lunch at the vineyard-to-table outdoor restaurant Malva, run by celebrated chef Roberto Alcocer, who is also behind the Michelin-starred restaurant Valle in Oceanside, California.

One of the first fully certified organic estates in Mexico, **Finca La Carrodilla** makes delicious chenin blancs and syrahs. Reserve a late-afternoon session in the upstairs tasting room, order cheese and charcuterie, and watch the glowing sun set on the hills. —*AVB*

Clockwise from top left: Tortilla preparation at Fauna; cacti are plentiful in Valle de Guadalupe; World's 50 Best named Fauna the best restaurant in Mexico; chef David Castro Hussong (pictured) and Maribel Aldaco Silva, a pastry chef, founded the restaurant in 2017.

I PONDER HER words that night at the restaurant Fauna. Opened in 2017 by chef David Castro Hussong—an alum of Eleven Madison Park, Noma, and Blue Hill, and the region's most energetic culinary ambassador—Fauna helped put the Valle on the radar of international foodies, joining such pioneering local restaurants as Finca Altozano from Tijuana star chef Javier Plascencia, and Deckman's En El Mogor from European-trained U.S. chef Drew Deckman. "Our visitors are still mostly Mexicans," Castro Hussong says. "Plus Americans looking for fun. Because American wine regions? They can be a little . . . overstructured . . . boring?"

All around us laughter gusts toward the repurposed wood ceiling as large, mostly Mexican groups offer toasts at rough-hewn communal tables. Ours features platters of fire-smoked broccoli in a green puree of aromatic chiltepin chilies that Castro Hussong grows in a potager right outside, and pearlescent Ensenada scallops in a black sauce of charred eggplant. The dishes keep coming: oysters in a bright *aguachile*, a ceviche of sea snails in a dusky-sweet *salsa macha*. We fill blue corn tortillas with marrow that we scoop from large beef bones and mash with blackened roasted carrots, dabbing it with habanero salsa that even Castro Hussong warns is "a little explosive."

An Ensenada native whose local family roots go back generations, Castro Hussong has gathered several exceptional women for our dinner tonight, including his mother, the artist Estela Hussong, and his wife, Maribel Aldaco Silva, the award-winning pastry chef behind Fauna's desserts. The grand dame of Mexican winemaking, Natalia Badan, who grew up at Rancho El Mogor, the vineyard and organic farm founded by her Swiss-French parents, arrives with a bottle of "humble" chasselas. She makes it from the Swiss grapes her brother planted decades ago—"a romantic dream of his" that thrived in the Valle soil.

"Twenty years ago," says Badan, a passionate environmental crusader, "I and others were a bunch of visionaries with our own dream of creating Mexican wine here. There was so much solidarity; we worked for this goal like ambassadors, teaching anyone who wanted to join our movement. It was a beautiful moment, and Mexican people were extremely responsive and accepted us generously. And now?" Her voice trails off into the dinnertime din.

"Now," she resumes, "we've been discovered. Tourism came, and with it, developers. Everyone wants a piece of our valley. But"—she gestures at Castro Hussong and Aldaco Silva— "we still have a strong, beautiful community here. And we trust our young generation, who are working so hard and giving their hearts."

We raise our glasses to that.

Contributing writer Anya von Bremzen wrote about Thessaloniki, Greece for Afar's Summer 2023 issue. Photographer Bethany Mollenkof is profiled on page 16.

DAY TRIP: ENSENADA

Twenty-seven miles south of Valle de Guadalupe, Ensenada was officially founded in 1882 after the discovery of gold. Today, it is Baja's third-largest city and supplies many of the region's restaurants with reina and chocolate clams, scallops, briny oysters, and rich bluefin tuna. Here's where to eat if you've got half a day in Mexico's seafood capital.

Clockwise from top left: Seafood stalls showcase Baja's coastal abundance; the late Anthony Bourdain called La Guerrerense's tostadas "the best street food in the world"; the road from Valle de Guadalupe to Ensenada is dotted with meat and seafood stands that offer a taste of Baja's culinary heritage; prepping corn husks to use for tamales.

FARMACIAS SUPREMA
TAXIS

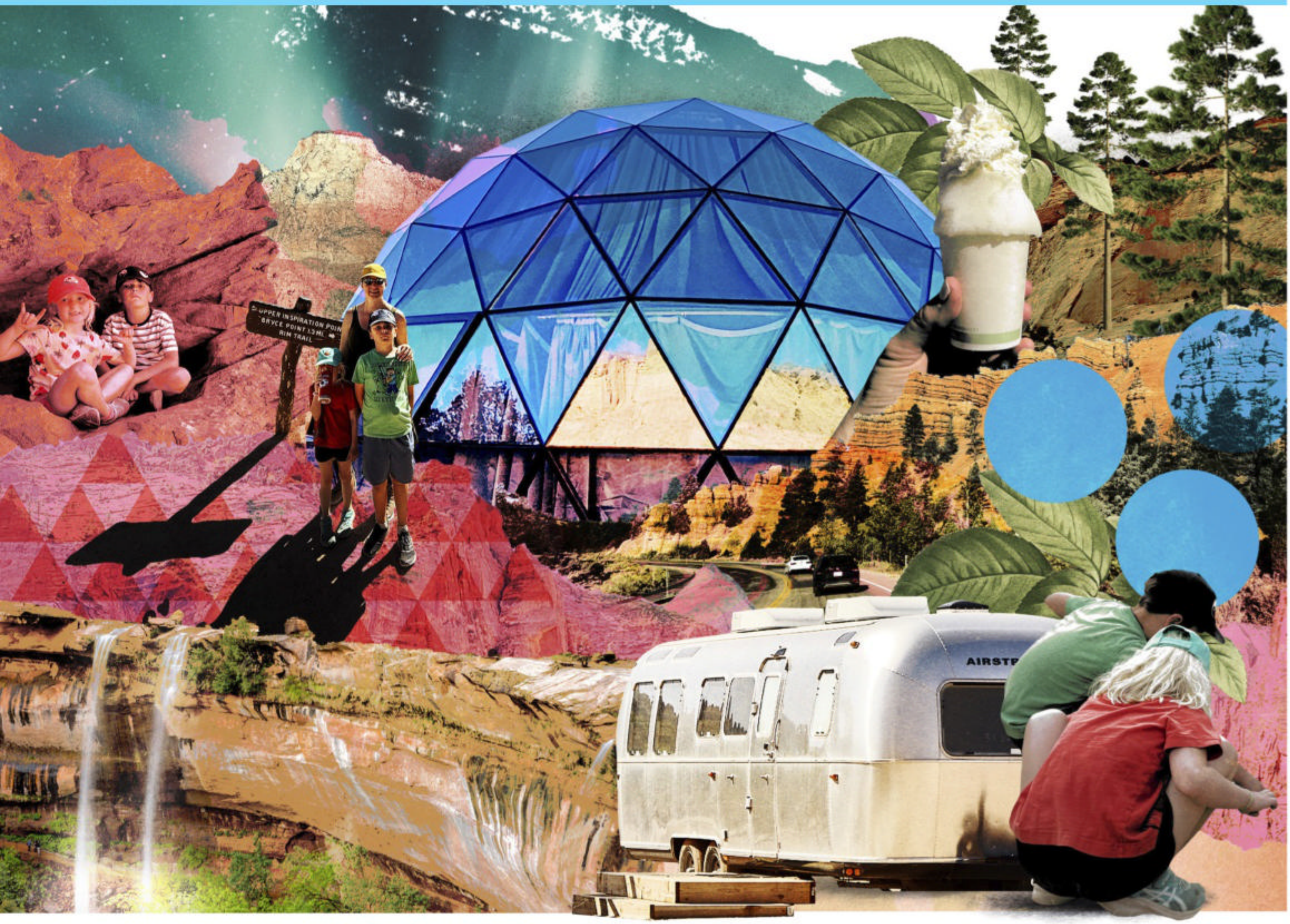
Mariscos El Gordito → Ensenada is known for its carretas (seafood stands). This one, a few blocks inland from the rollicking waterfront promenade, is famous for its *cóctel campechano*, an eight-dollar masterpiece with raw clams, octopus, shrimp, avocado, various salsas, and onions served in a big plastic cup.

La Guerrerense → Another carreta, La Guerrerense, is celebrated for its tostadas extravagantly loaded with seafood. They've won raves from the likes of the late Anthony Bourdain and chef René Redzepi.

La Morocha → A thriving seafood restaurant in Ensenada's downtown, La Morocha was opened by chefs David Castro Hussong and Ana Holguín in 2024. Dishes include shrimp ceviche, crab-topped flatbreads, seafood-studded black rice, and fish skin *chicharrón*.

Hussong's → After eating your fill at the above locations, grab a drink at this iconic cantina, which has claims to inventing the margarita and is owned by Castro Hussong's uncle. Still in its original 1892 location, the time-warp saloon features memorabilia along the walls and behind the long red bar, with peanut shells adrift underfoot, and a mounted antelope's head surveying the scene from above. —*AVB*

Just Back From Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks, Utah



Disconnecting in the Desert

by Michelle Baran, *Afar Deputy Editor*

MY FAMILY CALLS ME the screen police. But they'll thank me someday, I'm sure of it. My husband, Jonathan, and our two kids (Catalina, 5, and Niko, 8) weren't complaining when my latest effort to get us off our devices resulted in a weeklong, hiking-focused road trip through the extraterrestrial beauty of Bryce Canyon and Zion national parks in southern Utah last fall.

We rented a car in Las Vegas and drove three hours through desert landscapes to AutoCamp Zion, an Airstream-filled glamping site on the outskirts of the park. Our trailer was a perfect mix of ever-so-slightly roughing it with welcome comforts, such as a surprisingly spacious bathroom and a Tempur-Pedic mattress (and sofa bed for the kids).

The next day we hiked the three-mile Upper Emerald Pools Trail, where we walked alongside a waterfall surrounded by craggy cliffs dotted with green ponderosa pines. When it came time for an impromptu creek crossing, we took off our shoes, tied the laces together, and slung them over our shoulders. Niko and Catalina shrieked—half from delight and half from the chill of the water that lapped our ankles.

A few days later, we drove 100 miles northeast to Clear Sky Resorts Bryce Canyon, where the kids loved our geodesic glass-dome lodging. By day, we trekked through the area's iconic orange-and-white rock spires, called hoodoos, along the park's Mossy Cave and Rim trails. By night, we marveled at the unobstructed views of the starry sky from our beds. On our last evening, we caught a rare sight that was infinitely more impressive than anything our screens could offer: red- and purple-tinted northern lights showboating above our heads. The only thing better was the look of awe on my kids' faces.

MICHELLE BARAN; FILIP FUXA/SHUTTERSTOCK (WATERFALLS); CLEAR SKY RESORTS (GLASS DOME); AUTOCAMP ZION (AIRSTREAM)

Art by ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE

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